

**The Chinese View of World Order:
The Evolving Conceptualization of *Tianxia* (All-Under-Heaven)**

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The Chinese View of World Order:
The Evolving Conceptualization of *Tianxia* (All-Under-Heaven)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
SUMMARY	vii
 <u>CHAPTER</u>	
1 Introduction	1
Historical Excursus	3
Imperial Government Since the Qin	6
Schools of Philosophies	10
2 Comparison Between Roman and Chinese Empires	24
Rome	27
China	41
Conclusive Remarks	54
3 The PRC Era	57
The Concept of Authority in China	57
Two eras in the Mirror	62
The New Chinese Empire	67
4 Conclusion	76
<i>Tianxia</i> in Zhao Tingyang and Other Scholars	78
Future Research	89
REFERENCES	94

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Chinese Dynasties Chronology	9
Table 2: Summary of the key features to be discussed in the following comparison between the Roman and the Chinese Empire.	27
Table 3: Division of classes to form the army	35

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Chronology of the Roman and the Chinese Empire	25
Figure 2: Political Charges in Ancient Rome	30
Figure 3: Various people's assemblies and their electoral power	36
Figure 4: China during the Period of the Warring States	43
Figure 5: Structure of the State during Qin Dynasty	46
Figure 6: Representation of the political structure of the Chinese Imperial system	63
Figure 7: Representation of the political structure of the contemporary PRC system	63
Figure 8: Structure of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)	66
Figure 9: Representation of Syllogism	74

SUMMARY

The topic of this thesis is the Chinese view of world order centered on the concept of *Tianxia* (天下 – all-under-heaven). After an historical excursus on the origin of the Chinese imperial sociopolitical and philosophical system, the thesis explores the main characteristics of the early empires. Afterwards, the thesis attempts a comparison between the ancient Chinese empire and another ancient empire, the Roman Empire. The objective is to dig deeply within the political, administrative and legal roots of both empires, as they are the ancestors of two big civilizations: China and the West. Because of the great influence that these two antique political systems had on the current political arrangements of the two parts of the globe, the comparison should help detect the foundation of the systems and will allow to better understand the differences between them and the peculiarities of China's view of world order. Furthermore, the thesis analyzes the concept of *Tianxia* in post-1949 China, concentrating on the new applications of the concept, also drawing a comparison between political organization of imperial China in the past and the PRC (People's Republic of China) of our time. Lastly, the thesis explores how some scholars in today's China are reexamining, reframing, and re-advocating the ancient concept of *Tianxia* as China's new and alternative view of world order in the post-Cold War world.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the Chinese view of world order centered on the concept of *Tianxia* (天下 – all-under-heaven). I will clarify the concept and then discuss the development of it from its first appearance and adaptation in Chinese history until its contemporary reappearances, with a comparison to the alternative worldviews of the Roman Empire and the Westphalia System.

The structure of the thesis is outlined as follows.

The Introduction chapter presents an historical excursus on the origin of the Chinese imperial sociopolitical system. I will explore the main characteristics of the early empires, and more specifically of the first unified empire, the empire of the Qin Dynasty (秦 221 B.C. – 206 B.C.). Treating the Qin Empire is crucial to understanding of Chinese political system because it is for the first time during this period, that a centralized bureaucratic political organization based on the world view of *tianxia* was methodically implemented, and used by all subsequent rulers of China. In the same chapter, I will explain the main philosophical thoughts that have supported the creation and stability of the Chinese long-lasting empire.

The second chapter attempts a comparison between the ancient Chinese empire and another ancient empire, the Roman Empire. The objective of this chapter will be to dig deeply within the political, administrative and legal roots of both empires, as I

recognize in them the ancestor of the two big civilizations that I am comparing throughout this work; that is, the West and China. I acknowledge a great influence of these two antique political systems on the current political arrangements of the two parts of the globe; hence, the comparison should help detect the foundation of the systems and will allow us to better understand the differences between them and the peculiarities of China's view of world order.

The third chapter addresses the modern understanding of power and authority and explains how contemporary political leaders apply old concepts. After that, I will focus on the fate of the concept of *tianxia* in post-1949 China, concentrating on the new applications of the concept. Finally, I will draw a comparison between political organization of imperial China in the past and the PRC (People's Republic of China) of our time. Briefly, since its founding on October 1st, 1949, the government of the PRC has essentially been formed and controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a pyramidal sociopolitical structure, which resembles the structure of the China imperial system since the Qin Dynasty.

Lastly, the fourth chapter explores how some scholars in today's China are reexamining, reframing, and re-advocating the ancient concept of *tianxia* as China's new and alternative view of world order in the post-Cold War world. Hereafter, I will lay out my findings and further the main objectives of this analysis of China's ancient philosophies and political system: to reveal and evaluate some of the most striking aspects of continuity in China. After a massive and costly revolution in the name of socialism, equality and justice, the political power in China is still highly concentrated in the hands of an emperor-like authoritarian ruler based on an empire-like hierarchy that

controls Chinese institutions, resources, and even people's minds, closely resemble the millennia-old Qin system based on the *tianxia* worldviews. Yet, the outside world has been dominated by the Western, Westphalia system of international relations. The power of the *tianxia* concept and its possible revival and promotion by a rising Chinese power will be something the whole world has to deal with very carefully. With that in mind, I conclude this thesis by raising questions about the *tianxia* worldview in the study of international relations and Chinese foreign policy.

Historical Excursus

The testimony of the events of the first millennia of Chinese ancient history (from 2000 B.C. circa to 200 B.C.) is considerably attributed to two famous books: the *Zhou-Li* 周礼 (The Commentary of Zhou) and the *Yi-Li* 礼记 (The book of Property and Rituals)¹. Even though the originality of these two books is subject of controversial interpretations, they can be used to shade some light over the structure of the ancient empire. The books treat the period of the most mythological dynasties; that is, *Xia* (夏 2100-1600 B.C.), and *Shang* (商 1600-1066 B.C.), and the historical dynasty of the Western Zhou (*Xi-Zhou* 西周 1066-771 B.C.).

The Shang Dynasty is the first dynastic period for which historic records have been collected: they are mostly turtle's shells with pictographic inscriptions on. From other testimonies, it is possible to study what is believed to have happened even before the Xia

¹ Granet, Marcel, *Chinese Civilization*, (New York: Knopf, 1930).

dynasty. That is, a series of supernatural emperors considered the fundamental contributors of the development of the whole and complex humanity. The stories of the supernatural emperor are discussed in the book called *Shi-Ji* 史记 (Records of an Historian – completed around 86 B.C.). The compilation of the *Shi-Ji* is attributed to the famous historian Sima Qian². During the late-Han period (first two centuries A.D.) many sections of these records have been changed or influenced by different schools of thought, which were trying to shape the idealistic representation of authority to maintain order in the society. In any case, in the tradition the famous emperors of the ancient China were five (number that corresponds to the theory of the five elements – wood, fire, earth, metal and water), and they each represented a crucial innovation, which helped shape the whole world. They were: *Fu-xi*, the emperor who invented the writing system, created the institution of marriage, and taught to human beings how to fish, how to hunt and how to play music; *Shen-nong*, who discovered how to cultivate the land and how to recognize plants with medical proprieties; *Huang-di*, the emperor that taught men how to make utensils as wheels and carriage, and also knew the art of medicine; finally, there are *Yao* and *Shun*, who instituted religious rites, made offers to heaven and gave men the first laws. After Shun, the emperor *Yü* was selected, who divided the empire in provinces and established the succession to the throne with hereditary method. This is believed to have given birth to the Xia dynasty³.

During the Shang period, the kings were governing through the shamans' communications of the elites' ancestors with Shangdi 上帝 (God). The end of the Shang

² Sabbatini, M. and Paolo Santangelo, *Storia della Cina*, (Bari: Laterza, 2004), pp. 39-41.

³ Bertuccioli, Giuliano, *La Letteratura Cinese*, (Milano: Sansoni, 1968), pp. 17-20.

Dynasty signed the decline of importance of the shamans and their divinations. It is interesting that both the Xia and the Shang dynasty are thought as finished when an especially tyrannical emperor had taken power; hence, there was a need to replace the tyrant with a morally superior sovereign. In fact, with the following dynasty, the Zhou dynasty, the concept of virtue (*de* 德) appeared for the first time. Each sovereign needed to possess virtue to be worth of the Heaven's Mandate. With the Zhou dynasty, the world of divinity got separated from the explanations of the actual world, because during the Zhou period this concept of the Mandate of Heaven started changing the concept of regality.

The concept of Mandate of Heaven (*tian-ming* 天命) started during the Western Zhou, developed during the Eastern Zhou (*Xi-Zhou* 西周 750-256 B.C.) and it increased in importance after the *Han* dynasty (汉 206 B.C. – A.D. 220). Intrinsic in this concept is the idea that the whole universe is dominated by an impersonal but omnipotent Heaven (*tian* 天). In order to govern, a man needs to have the Mandate of Heaven, which entrusts the ruler with responsibilities for “all-that-is-under-heaven” (*tianxia* 天下), which is the country as a whole. For this reason, Westerners often translated *tianxia* with the comprehensive meaning of empire.⁴ Hence, starting from the king of Zhou, the ruler was considered the Son of Heaven, even though in this name there was not reference to a living holy being.

In 770 B.C. started the period of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (*Dong Zhou* 东周). The capital of the empire was moved to Luoyang, and a new historic period called

⁴ Granet, Marcel, *Chinese Civilization*, (New York: Knopf, 1930).

‘Spring and Autumn’ (*Chunqiu* 春秋) started, which according to the ‘Annals of the State of Lu’ (attributed to Confucius) goes from 770 to 476 B.C. During this period the states around the central state started to loudly request more autonomy and became more worrisome. The centralized feudalism went through a phase of instability; however the conflicts were more diplomatic than really militarily engaged, usually. Nevertheless, in the year 453 B.C., the territory of the state of Jin was divided into three new states: Han, Wei and Zhao. This separation is considered the beginning of a new phase called of the Warring States (*zhan guo* 战国). This period lasted until 222 B.C., when Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝 (which means ‘first emperor of Qin) created the first Chinese centralized empire⁵. Qin Shi Huang “using force, managed to concentrate in his hands the power to make law, and obtained legitimization of his violence through the justification that he was pursuing a punitive expedition for the Son of Heaven.”⁶

Imperial Government Since the Qin

Many scholars have identified the dynasties reported in the book Zhou-Li (The Commentary of Zhou) as an elaborate form of centralized feudalism. Of course, the definition of feudal system is borrowed from European categories of analysis and, consequently, it suffers somewhat a stretching, which at the same time helps clarify the Chinese version of feudalism. The difference was in the family relations that linked all

⁵ Granet, Marcel, *Chinese Civilization*, (New York: Knopf, 1930).

⁶ An excerpt from: “*A perspective on Chinese General History*” (Zhongguo tongshide yizhong dufa), 2000.

the various kings and local lords to the king of the central kingdom. In Europe there were sort of contractual arrangements between the lord and the vassals, while in China the ruling class needed to be somewhat blood related naturally or forcibly. In other words, when there was no family relationship, it was imperative to create one, exploiting the ‘technique’ of arranged marriages.

The structure of the empire during the Zhou period was constituted by a central state *zhongguo* 中国 (also the Chinese name for today’s China since the late 19th century) and many states *guo* 国, which were submitted to the central state in a feudal relationship. These local states maintained virtual autonomy. According to the records of the Zhou-Li, the various states of the empire had different status, proportioned to the distance from the royal capital. Each state had its own administration, but the king of the central state, (Zhou’s son of heaven) was the one who had the power to select the functionaries, while the central kingdom administration was entrusted to six dignitaries: a minister of heaven, (for general policy recommendations), of earth (for education), of spring (for court rituals), of summer (for routine administration), of autumn (for punishment), and a minister of winter (for logistical aspects of government). Moreover, the king of the central state had control over six armies, while the different states had one, two, or three according to the their rank.⁷ The doctrine of the Zhou was: “all land is the king’s land, and all people are the king’s people”. The central kingdom during the Zhou Dynasty was relatively strong. The yearly tribute that the local kings had to pay to the sovereign of the central state was one of the features of the empire that started with the Zhou, and

⁷ Hucker, Charles, O., *China’s Imperial Past*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975).

increases its significance with the following dynasties and has been endured for centuries. In 536 B.C., the central state promulgated a complete set of rules and regulations, which were engraved on bronze. That was the first step to regain the unification and bureaucratization that was only accomplished at a brand new level a couple of centuries later with the official unification of China under only one centralized rule of the emperor, Qin Shi Huang⁸, the new, almighty, son of the heaven.

For the sake of accuracy, it is important to clarify that the two books previously cited, the Zhou Li and the Li Ji, from which we have the largest section of information for the time of the Zhou and previous periods, are both works attributed to scholars of the Han period. Hence, the contents of them often reflect more the idealized political beliefs and the reality of the Qin-Han period, rather than being accurate records of the political structure of the Zhou dynasty.

To appreciate the Table that follows, we need to keep in mind that the establishment of the Qin dynasty changed Chinese history forever. Until the time of the Warring States, small kingdoms were violently fighting each other to obtain power. However, with the Qin dynasty the feature of the centralized power, which is able to establish and maintain power through strict moral and legal control, guaranteed to each dynasty the strength that will allow them to keep control authority. Of course, this happened no without struggle and violence, but in the end, the following dynasties assured continuity until modern history. For this reason, Chinese history is considered a circular evolution of dynasties, followed by their crashes, which will be again followed by the rise of a new centralized dynasty.

⁸ Ibid, 52.

Table 1.

中國朝代列表 list of Dynasties of China

夏	Xia	2100-1600 BC
商	Shang	1600-1066 BC
周	Zhou	1066-256 BC
西周	Western Zhou	1066 - 771 BC
東周	Eastern Zhou	770 - 256 BC
春秋	Spring and Autumn	770 - 476 BC
戰國	Warring State	475 BC - 221 BC
秦	Qin	225 BC - 206 BC
漢	Han	206 BC - 220 AD
西漢	Western Han	206 BC - 23 AD
東漢	Eastern Han	25 - 220
三國	Three kingdoms	220 - 280
魏	Wei	220 - 265
蜀	Shu	221 - 263
吳	Wu	222 - 280

Table 1. Chinese Dynasties Chronology

Schools of Philosophies

The period from the time of ‘Spring and Autumn’ to the end of the ‘Warring States’ is known for turbulence and instability, but also for the new philosophies and beliefs that flourished and that shaped forever the future of Chinese views and thinking. The difficulties of the era stimulated the Chinese to think of pragmatic solutions to create a society where living was not unfeasible because of ongoing wars and hostilities. The different prescriptions to face the troubles of the era are divided in three big streams of thought: Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism, among many others. I will hereafter explore the main characteristics of each of these three philosophies, as understanding them is crucial to examine the Chinese political organization and ideals in both ancient and modern times.

Before explaining the basic differences of each philosophical thought, it is extremely important to understand that the roots of most Chinese political thoughts are in the idea that the universal cosmos is a sole and indivisible entity, for which there is no beginning and there will be no end. Chinese have a holistic conception of the world, which they believe to be divided into three principal elements: heaven, earth, and man. In this interpretation man and heaven are part of the same universe, in which on one hand, Heaven, with the words of Mo Zi: “desires life and hates death, desires wealth and hates poverty, desires order and hates disorder. [...] Heaven desires righteousness and hates

unrighteousness.”⁹ On the other the hand, the man tries to behave at his best. The ruler’s responsibility is to cope with the other two elements, heaven and earth. For this purpose the ruler can ask for help to the spirits of the ancestors that eternally continue to be part of the universe.

Confucianism

The philosophy of Confucianism is a complex set of ethical and political ideas that put emphasis on social and political relationships, generally modeled after a paternal family structure. Confucianism draws its name from the founder of this philosophy, Kong Fu Zi. The name of Kong Fu Zi has been rendered in Latin with the phonetic translation of Confucius, from where the school name also comes from. Confucius lived during the period of Spring and Autumn (770-476 B.C.), it is known that his family had lost its noble position, and had moved to the state of Lü, before Confucius was born. Hence, he was poor as an out-of-wedlock boy, but he studied hard, and became a scholar (*ru* 儒). Afterward, he served briefly as a minister in the state of Lü, and founded the Ru School *Rujia* 儒家 (the Confucian school). Later, he was forced into exile and started traveling and teaching all over China, where he became the first teacher in China to have a vast number of students and adepts.

After Confucius himself, other great thinkers contributed to the evolution of Confucianism, adding new components to the basic beliefs imparted from the master; the two most famous of those were Mencius and Xunzi, who are respectively recognized as

⁹ Watson, Burton, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 79.

the idealistic wing and the realistic wing of the Confucian school; the first with his main idea of the goodness of the human nature, and the second with his belief in the evilness of all the human beings.

Scholars have defined this Confucian ideas as the Confucian Consensus. This consensus has been summarized in seven main points:

1. Universe and human beings are governed by the Heaven (*tian* 天), which is ungovernable and not anthropomorphic.
2. Heaven desires for men to be happy and conform to the cosmic harmony (*dao* 道).
3. The finest contribution that men can bring to the cosmic harmony is to conduct an ethical and virtuous life.
4. The proper behavior (*li* 礼) is the direct manifestation of the virtue (*de* 德).
5. The ruler has to make hard choices before troublesome situations; he has to pick the right value in order to be a good leader.
6. To understand the *li* 礼 to follow, it is important to learn the teaching of the sages of the past, and it is necessary to study hard through the lessons of history and nurture oneself through serious and constant efforts.
7. Every human being is potentially a sage; hence, society is potentially harmonious and enjoyable for all.¹⁰

¹⁰ Hucker, Charles, O., *China's Imperial Past*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 83-84.

There is a fundamental point of the Confucian doctrine that is missing from the list of the Confucian Consensus. That is, the basic element to actually reach harmony is the ethical concept of familiar relationships. Relationships are divided in five main interactions, which have reciprocal value. They are the relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, younger brother and elder brother, husband and wife, and finally friend and friend. What is controlling these relations is the proper behavior (*li* 礼) listed number four in the seven points of the Confucian Consensus. In other words, the Confucian principle of a “superior man” capable of maintaining a highly moral behavior is what becomes the law. That is, a harmonious society is the result of the application of the moral virtue through the *li*. *Li* is what every man needs to cultivate in himself to contribute to the realization of a well-ordered society. This is possible because every member of the society is identified with a specific role, which divides each person rank and duty from another (process called “Rectification of Names”) in a structured, “heaven-given,” and permanent way, much like parenthood. Through this process each one is expected to do exactly what his own role dictates him to do, nothing more or less and this in the Confucian ideology, is the secret to prevent disorder and turmoil. *Li* becomes a sort of law of nature that orders and organizes the society.

These Confucian values have been taught in China throughout the ages, publicly or just inside the family context. It did not become a state-sanctioned sole doctrine of political system, however, until the 1st century AD during the Han Dynasty. It can be said that these values are very much inherent to the Chinese society and, even with censorships during the Chinese revolutions since 1911, they are still very much in place

in the 21st century. The ideas that emphasize the role of the family and structured relations based on the respect of filial piety are still influencing strongly many Chinese today.

Such an ethical concept of relationships has nourished the formation of political rules and norms throughout the centuries. Built on the basic concept of individual morality and good will of each human being, the laws that developed from Confucian ideas are linked to the role of the society in reforming and persuading people in acting morally and in obedience to morality. Criminals are the outcome of the mistakes of the whole society, all its institutions and their lack of right teaching against the wrongdoers. In sum, individual virtues such as humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are what a society needs to cultivate through education and punishment to create order and harmony; once the ruler possesses these four fundamental qualities the society will consequently be prosperous.

Confucianism became the official philosophy endorsed by many imperial rulers since Emperor Han Wudi , who ruled from 141 B.C. until 87 B.C. The Confucian ideal of aspiration to self-perfection, to create a wealthy and structured society, was the ideological façade that emperors used to legitimate their power throughout the centuries. However, it is impossible to believe that natural laws and good intentions could keep the Chinese empire united for so long. The absence of a legal system, which would take care of the oppositions, of the enemies, and the criminal is only apparent. A clarification will be given shortly, when we will discuss the Legalist school. In the meanwhile, let's keep in mind the romantic idea of the virtuous and uncorrupted ruler that goes as far as leaving his position, whenever his job would be judged morally inappropriate. This scheme has

been a genial method, used by Chinese leaders, to legitimate authority and supremacy since the second century B.C.

Daoism

Daoism developed during the period of the Warring States, and one of its main beliefs is that the difficulties of public life need to be avoided. It has been the only indigenous Chinese school of thought that reached the status of a major religion. Unlike many other major religions in the world, Daoism does not have much political influence on the Chinese state. Therefore, even though the Chinese imported and created various sophisticated belief systems, none of them really served as a state religion, hence the religious impact on Chinese politics has been weak and Chinese view of political authority and “world order” has not been put in any particular religious context, other than the previously discussed, rather secular “heaven-man-earth” framework.¹¹

Daoism comes from the word *dao* 道 and it is translated as “the way”. It is more of an individualistic and poetic description of the relation with nature; therefore, it has not much to contribute to the understanding of the governmental agendas, which the Daoists refused to take into consideration.¹² However, it is important to be familiar with Daoism precisely for the indifference that the political power has showed toward it throughout the centuries. That is, Daoism political teachings were not the *sine-qua-non*

¹¹ Fung, Yu-lan, *A short history of Chinese Philosophy*, (England: Macmillan Publishing, 1948).

¹² Fung, Yu-lan, *A short history of Chinese Philosophy*, (England: Macmillan Publishing, 1948).

for the stability of the empire, rather the opposite. In fact, Daoism's detachment from political life and Daoism sort of individualism, were considered disruptive beliefs for building a harmonious society reliant of family and king-servant relations. To better understand the values advocated by this philosophy, I will quote a section of the main book of the Daoism, the *Dao De Jing*, titled "Inaction":

The follower of knowledge learns as much as he can every day;

The follower of the Way forgets as much as he can every day.

By attrition he reaches a state of inaction

Wherein he does nothing, but nothing remains undone.

To conquer the world, accomplish nothing;

If you must accomplish something,

The world remains beyond conquest.¹³

Legalism

The third important philosophy I want to examine is Legalism. In the famous book of the historian Sima Qian authored around 90 B.C., the Legalist school (*fajia* 法家) appeared, based on the teachings of the School of Legalist scholars. Legalist teachings can be synthesized as: emphasis on authority and order, importance of administrative techniques and sheer power, and the reliance on using law, force and manipulation of

¹³ Laozi, "Inaction", in *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 48, <http://www.chinapage.com/gnl.html>, accessed November 30, 2006.

human weaknesses. More than a philosophy, Legalism can be interpreted as a set of instructions for rulers and ministers.

The representative philosopher of Legalism is considered to be Han Fei Zi. Han Fei Zi's dates are not certain, but in the book of *Shi-Ji* 史记 (also known as *Records of the Historian*) the author, Sima Qian (considered the first Chinese historian), writes that Han Fei Zi was probably a student under the eminent Confucian philosopher Xun Zi. At this point, I will take a look at Xun Zi to illustrate and stress Han Fei's central arguments and ideas, especially those that are in resemblance with his teacher.

Xun Zi

Xun Zi was a Confucian philosopher who distinguished himself for his interpretation of human nature. He has been identified as the realist soul of the Confucian school. Xun Zi considered human nature inherently evil. However, he thought, as Mencius also believed, that by the righteous and proper use of culture, the nature of man can be domesticated. In an interesting quote from the tenth of the 32 chapters that form his work, Xun Zi writes:

Man's strength is not equal to that of the ox; his running is not equal to that of the horse; and yet ox and horse are used by him. How is this? I say that it is because men are able to form social organizations, whereas the others are unable... When united, men have

greater strength; having greater strength, they become powerful; being powerful, they can overcome other creatures. (Chapter 10)¹⁴

Nevertheless, Xun Zi differentiated himself from Mencius, since the solution he offered to the issue of order and harmony in the world, is based upon the institution of social organization with the necessity of rules of conduct not only based on moral and ethic teaching. Xun Zi pushed his position to the extent of stressing the importance of rules and laws. For instance, when Xun Zi discusses the notorious Confucian argument of the Rectification of Names, he uses a utilitarian approach. He explicitly makes clear that names are not heavenly given, but are assigned by conventions, and explains that rulers and their governments should determine meanings and functions, and should do this by the application of fix rules. Xun Zi's student, Han Fei Zi, departing from this fundamental contribution, developed his own theory, which later became the focal point of the Legalist school.

Han Fei Zi

Han Fei Zi was of noble origins, connected with the royal family of Han. Throughout all his life he had to fight against his noble birth. Han Fei Zi wrote a book explaining his ideas on power and governance and the importance of laws and rules. The contents of the book pleased the King of the state of Qin that soon was to become the first Chinese emperor, and who had invited Han Fei Zi to go to his court. However, one of the

¹⁴ Fung, Yu-lan , *A short history of Chinese Philosophy*, (England: Macmillan Publishing, 1948).

ministers of the king of Qin, Li Si, who knew Han Fei Zi from the time they were both students of Xun Zi, admonished the king that because Han Fei Zi was born in the Han royal family would never be completely devoted to his kingdom. For this reason, Han Fei Zi was poisoned and died without even being able to communicate his theories to the emperor.¹⁵

As I said before, Han Fei Zi had studied with Xun Zi. Han Fei Zi stretched his teacher's idea of the intrinsic evil nature of human being to the point of declaring how fruitless could be to try to acculturate common people, while they still will want to get the wealth of other and for that behave horribly. According to Han Fei Zi, the ruler need to act only based on the notion of self-interest. Xun Zi's view of human nature definitely contributed to add one more element to the distinction between Legalist philosophy and the moralist Confucian-Mencian ideals, which conveys that each man is potentially sage and can contribute to a better society. Furthermore, Legalists assert that power is all that matters, and just being sage cannot guarantee the achievement of authority over others. While Confucianism is interested in politics centered around ethics and logic and aesthetics, Legalism focuses on the single and most important problem; that is, how to preserve, strengthen, and use the power of the state.

Han Fei Zi was only one of the masterminds of Legalism; he improved a set of concepts coming from several other works that date back to the Zhou dynasty. One document that particularly influenced Han Fei Zi's thoughts was the Book of Lord Shang, attributed to a statesman called Wei Yang (338 B.C.), who served as a high minister in

¹⁵ Watson, Burton, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 1-2.

the state of Qin. This book was famous to be concentrated almost exclusively on political science with Legalist characteristics or the art of rule as an authoritarian monarch. Lord Shang (also known as Shang Yang), in one part of his book clarified that:

The ancient rulers fixed the standard of measures and weights as a continuous rule till today; without these standards, people would have to arbitrarily determine the light from heavy, and subjectively guess the short from the long; therefore, law is the standardized rule... Law is the authoritative force of the people, and the key of governing... A wise ruler must signify the rule by law, so to speak, and act according to law so that the country would expand, the army would be strong, and the ruler would be venerated. Rule by law is the fundamental to governing.¹⁶

There is another book that had influenced Han Fei Zi's thinking: the work of Shen Buhai, from where Han Fei Zi drawn the concept of *shu*. *Shu* can be translated as policies, strategies or tactics, methods, or art of governing, which the ruler applies by using power to force everyone to respect the laws that do not govern the rulers themselves, in order to control officials and all the people under his authority.

The goal of the Legalist teaching was to use laws and harsh penalties to strengthen the central government and to establish effective and direct control over all territories, new conquered lands and all populations. Finally, it was to substitute the old aristocracy and feudal system with a loyal and reliable organization of bureaucrats all are

¹⁶ Ren Xin, *Tradition of the Law and Law of the Tradition: Law, State, and Social Control in China*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997).

appointed by, hence obey the ruler. To reach this goal, it was important to restrain the formation of any kind of new ideas and alternative ways of life or autonomous social and political organizations that could endanger the realization of the ultimate aim. Everybody, especially scholars, were to be left in a state of unawareness and terror, while an elaborate set of laws were to be decided by the ruler, make circulate between his officials, and taught and explained by them to the uneducated population.¹⁷

Moreover, there is one more important difference between Legalist and Confucian beliefs; that is, the respect and admiration for the past that is present in point six of the Confucian Consensus and is completely missing from any Legalist teaching. Actually, the Legalists elaborated a list of “Six Parasitic Functions” that could disrupt a prince’s authority and majesty, and against which it was necessary to fight and among those there was the care for the old ages.¹⁸ Amazingly, the “Six Parasitic Functions” reminding one of the notions of the communist government during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976): care for old age, unemployment, beauty, love, ambitions, and Confucian proper conduct.

Confucianism coated with Legalism

Legalism is the source of political pragmatism based on realism of power politics all the way to the era of Deng Xiaoping (1980s - 1990s), in which the predicaments were all directed toward what needed to be done, after having united China or the known

¹⁷ Watson, Burton, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 9-10.

¹⁸ Needham, Joseph and Colin A. Ronan, *The Shorter Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 1, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

“world”, to ensure the state to survive, be strong and prosper. The idea of unity already existed in Mencius’ thinking, where unity was seen as possessing moral value. However in Mencius it was a reaction to the insecurity of the contemporary conditions, it was more of a dreamed desire, than a political doctrine to be pursued in reality.¹⁹ With the Legalist philosophy, unity and power became the ultimate goal of a good sovereign.

Rulers should not trust anyone, and cannot afford to be transparent to the subordinates. Instead, using harsh laws, which are man-made and are pure instrument of those in power, the ruler should manipulate the people to maintain power.²⁰ The Legalist concept of rule is peculiar and has many commonalities with the laws applied by the totalitarian regimes such as that of the Mao Zedong era’s PRC (1949-1976). Law (*fa* 法) was for legalists a set of fixed rules to which everyone in the state, except the ruler himself, was obliged to abide, or strict penalties would apply.

It can be argued that the Confucian ideology is a source of the essences in the Chinese political tradition, while the Legalist philosophy constituted the hard core of China’s imperial political system. For example, the Legalists first introduced to the ancient Chinese society the idea of ruling by law rather than rule of law, and the judicial bureaucracy of Chinese empire was based on the Legalist philosophy that calls for law to be made and used by the ruler, not applying to the ruler in any ways. The use of sheer

¹⁹ Loewe, Michael, “The Concept of Sovereignty,” in *The Cambridge History of China* Vol. 1, by Twitchett, Denis and Michael Loewe eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁰ Hucker, Charles, O., *China’s Imperial Past*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 94-95.

force constitutes the foundation of a ruler's power hence the effectiveness of his law; and the familiar political ideology of Confucianism serves to help justifying the imperial enforcement of those laws.

Therefore, it may appear paradoxical to see that every sovereign in China, until contemporary rulers in the PRC, has used Confucian ideals of harmonious society ("harmonious society" is the main philosophy predicated today by the current president of the People's Republic of China, Hu Jintao) as a façade to obtain legitimacy for their acts that are essentially based on the use of power and manipulation. Ever since Qin, China's rulers have always employed the calculated, cynical and often amoral legalist philosophy of realist power politics.

CHAPTER 2

COMPARISON BETWEEN ROMAN AND CHINESE EMPIRES

It is both interesting and provocative to draw a comparison between two of the most ancient and powerful empires ever existed: the Chinese Empire and the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire and the Chinese Empire, other than their similar achievements, share many similarities in the organizations of the two empires. However, there are clearly vast, significant dissimilarities between the two polities that are more evident and striking for our final intent. My purpose for pursuing this comparison is to help decipher what features of the two very different empires have had an impact on the development in the domestic and international organization of the different political systems of the West Europe and East Asia especially China.

First of all, it is useful to lay out which is exactly the period of the comparison. Therefore, I will explain what was happening in China from the unification of the first empire, under Qin Shi Huangdi, until the end of the Late Han dynasty (221 B.C. – 220 A.D). In the meantime, I will treat what was happening in Rome roughly during the same period. I will clarify this timeline in Figure 1., which represents the key points in the history of the two empires in comparison. The first graph represents the history of Rome, while the second depicts the major events of the history of China between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D.

Figure 1.

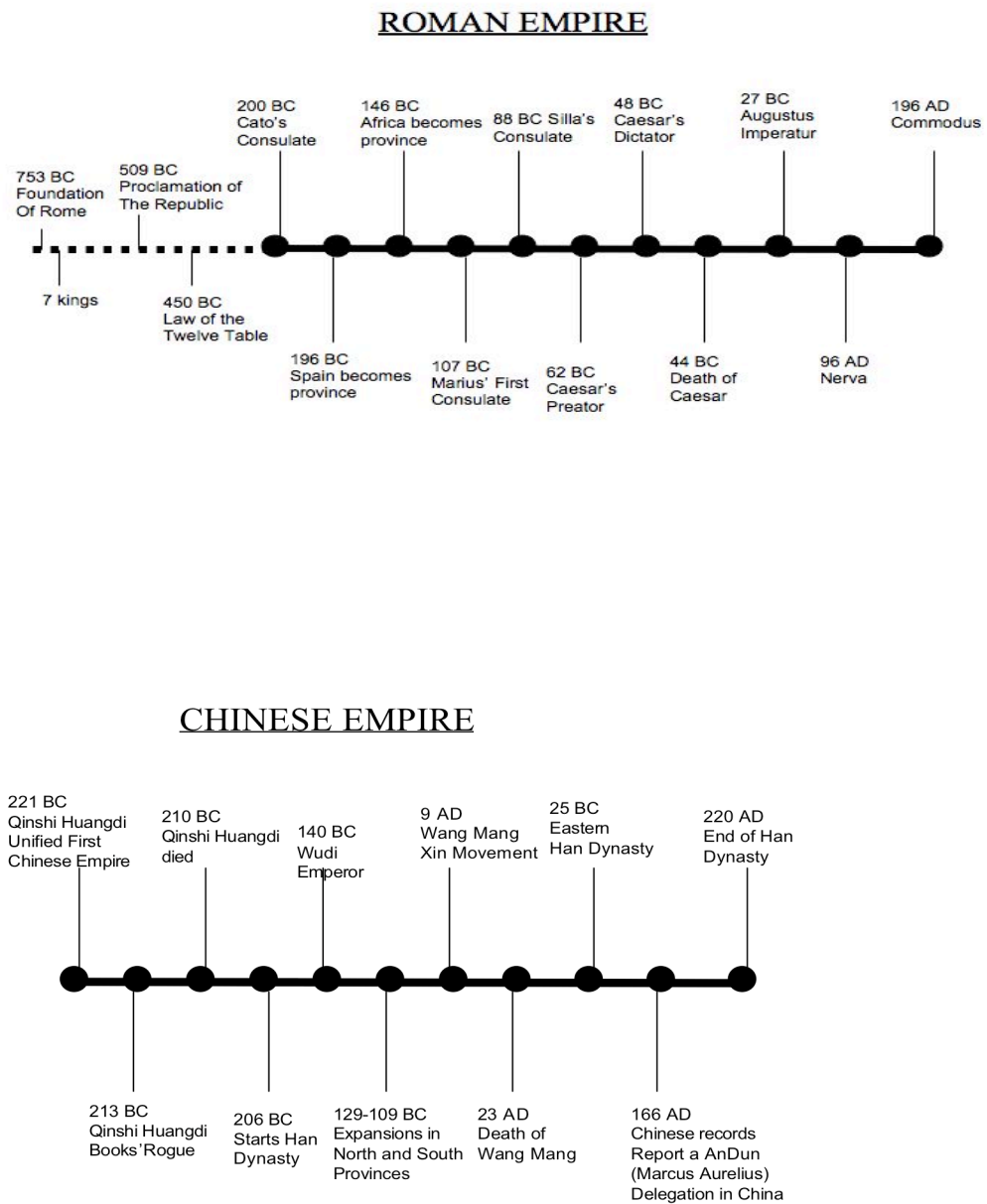


Figure 1. Chronology of the Roman and the Chinese Empire

To summarize, after the unification of the Chinese Empire, occurred in 221 B.C. and guided by the first Chinese Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, China experienced a type of political unity and continuity, which have been the key characteristic of the Chinese Empire throughout centuries, and until today. As we have acknowledged in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the consolidation of the unification of the Chinese Empire was based on a sort of compromise between the philosophy of the Legalists school and that of the Confucian school, occurred in Han, although the initial unification and creation of the Chinese Empire out of the ruins of the feudal states was mainly done through the use of sheer force as prescribed by the Legalists. On the other hand, Rome, in the two centuries before Christ (corresponding to Qin Shi Huangdi's reign and the early Han dynasty), saw the end of the republican period which was already a centralized and externally imperialistic power; while, during the two centuries after Christ was born (corresponding to the Late Han dynasty), Rome became a full-bloom empire, as the old republican constraints on the Roman Emperor's central government was reduced to next to extinction.

In addition, to visualize the comparison, I have drawn the following Table 2., which summarizes the main features I have evaluated in both the Roman and the Chinese empires. I will systematically explain this Table and clarify the main points by outlining the findings of my research.

Table 2.

	ROME	CHINA
Period	End of Republican era, transition to Empire	221 B.C. First Empire 220 A.D. End of Han
Government Organization	Republic (electoral system - Senate, Consuls) Empire (absolute power of one, with republican institutions)	Pyramidal Emperor above everybody and everything
Laws	Roman Law; Private and Public rights (everybody equal before laws)	Laws of punishment and award (emperor not subject to it)
Society	Classes but possibility of moving up (importance of commerce)	Officials and non- officials (merchants lower position)
Foreign Affairs	Romanization through integration, citizenship and civil rights	Sino-centrism and tributary system

Table 2. Summary of the key features to be discussed in the following comparison between the Roman and the Chinese Empire.

Rome

Period

The focus of the comparison is between 200 B.C. circa, until the years around 200 A.D. I chose this fix timeframe because is the period of Chinese history that I will consider, which goes from the beginning of the Qin dynasty until the end of the Han dynasty. However, understanding the big picture of the history of Rome is mandatory to appreciate the time we are focusing on. I will here briefly discuss the three main phases in which Rome's history has been divided, and see how Rome became an empire.

The first phase of the history of Rome would be the Monarchic Phase, when the king was elected by the Senate and kept the power until his death. The king had political, judicial, military and religious power. The monarchic period was also the time when casts and aristocratic feudatories were becoming wealthier and wealthier, while the poorer in the society were more and more linked to the rich for the large amount of debts they had to face. That is, Rome was a society with clientele and patronages. The monarchic phase started with the legendary date of the foundation of Rome, 753 B.C. and corresponds to the entire period of the famous seven kings of Rome – Romulus, Numa Pompilius, Tullus Hostilius, Ancus Mancius, Lucius Traquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, Lucius Traquinius Superbus. According to the tradition, the last king wanted to institute an absolute and hereditary monarchy, but the Romans were opposed to this form of government and they proclaimed the republic. It was the year 509 B.C.

Therefore, we enter in the second phase of Roman history: the Republican Phase, which would go from 509 B.C. until the foundation of the empire of Augustus (27 B.C.). During this time, the power was not in the hand of a king with life-long control; on the contrary, the Senate, formed by the nobles, was in power and the members of the Senate were electing two Consuls, each year, chosen from some patrician families -- this period of the republic is recognized as the ‘aristocratic republic’, because the only people that were admitted into the Senate were members of aristocratic families. The two Consuls and the Senate were the only sectors of the society allowed to make law; nevertheless, they did not have any religious power. The republican phase is also the period when the first military development occurred, with the establishment of army formed with professional soldiers; in addition, commercial exchanges also had started for the first

time. The expansion of these two types of activities helped the lower classes to advance in the society and increase their social and political prestige. During this era the society started to open up; we see the passage from a society of casts to a society where private initiative and self-enrichment became source of wealth and power.

The third phase is the Imperial Phase, which goes from the beginning of the reign of Octavian Augustus in 27 B.C. to the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 A.D. In this time, the concept of state as an amalgam of different regions developed. Every region started communicating within each other for commercial and cultural purposes. The imperial phase was the beginning of an organization of the world that can be defined the ancestor of modern capitalism. The specific periods of interest for the comparison in this chapter are segments of the last two phases, the republican and the imperial phase.

Government organization

The most important point to remember is that, since the monarchic period, the positions and the functions attributed to the individuals in charge, either the king or the senators, were all assigned with an elective process. I will now examine the division of the main organ of the republican government, which was kept, after several revisions, also during the imperial government. The following detailed description of the organization of the state of Rome during the republican phase is crucial to being able later to jump to the period of major interest for us: the third phase. That is, the imperial phase of the history of ancient Rome. To summarize, the commander in chief of Rome has always been elected, even during the monarchic period (even though the election may have had just a legitimization role – but nonetheless important in separating the Roman Empire

from a Qin style empire). The role of the institutions was fundamental for the society, the various sectors of the society with time were all admitted in the Senate, which was the highest expression of decision-making power. Finally, since early phases of the republic, the emanation and the written record of laws was to express the equality of all the people in front of the law, and was to become the ancestor of those laws on which the Western modern society based its foundation.

Figure 2.

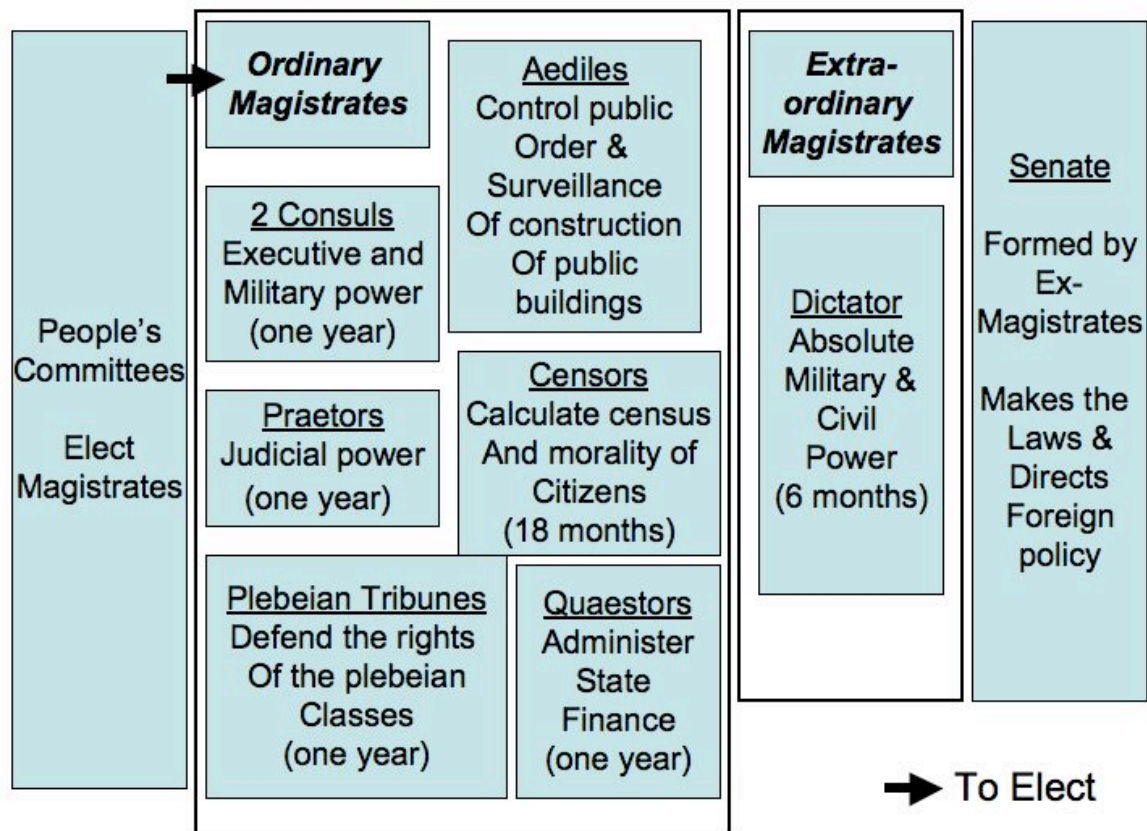


Figure 2. Political Charges in Ancient Rome²¹

²¹ Barberis, Carlo, *Storia Antica e Medievale*, (Milano: Edizioni Principato, 1997).

The Senate and the Magistratures

The Senate was the highest organ of the republican state. Many magistrates, who each covered different and specific roles, formed the Senate. There were two Consuls, who detained executive and military power. In other words, they applied the laws and in case of war they commanded the armies, but each one had the power only every other day. Below the Consuls there was the Praetor, who had judicial power; with time, the number of the Praetors increased. In addition, there was the role of Aediles and the Quaestors. Respectively, those who had to control the public order, the markets, the distribution of supply and the building and maintenance of public constructions; and those who had to take care of the financial problems and of the administration of the state's treasury. Furthermore, there were the Censors. Censors were first elected every five years, but their time in office was to last only eighteen months. They had to calculate the citizens' census for military and fiscal purposes. Later, when the legionaries became citizens and gained electoral power, this role became more and more important because they had the power to judge the morality of senators and politicians. A negative note could be lethal for their career. Finally, there were the Plebeian Tribunes, those who were interested in defending the position of the lower classes and could veto laws that would harm plebeians' existence. All those were the ordinary Magistratures. Each one of those magistrates was responsible for the decisions he made, and in case of fault, he could not be persecuted until the end of his period of duty. However, his salary could be interrupted, whether a colleague had denounced him. Moreover, there were also extraordinary Magistratures, which would be applied only in emergency cases. The most

important was the Dictatorship. The Dictator summoned absolute powers, both civil and military; however, this could last only for six months and could be instituted only in moment of profound crisis.

Since all the functions of the Magistratures were temporary, the Senate acquired a position of crucial importance that was fundamental for the whole republican institutions. A prerogative of the Senate was the conduction of foreign affairs, and it also was the most important decision-maker in questions of annual budget and missions of conquest. In sum, all the aspects of roman public life – economics, politics, judicial, and military – were all to pass under the control of the Senate or were at least influenced by the Senate's decisions.

Laws

A decisive date for the plebeian class was the year 450 B.C., when for the first time laws were carved on bronze and exposed publicly in the Forum for everybody to be read and learned. The set of laws is known as the Law of the Twelve Tables (*Lex Duodecim Tabularum*), where for the first time the principle of equality in front the law and the principle of people's sovereignty became official law. From that moment, the tradition of orally communicate laws was considered ended. Even though these tables were destroyed in 390 B.C., during the war Rome fought against the Gauls, many scholars have recorded excerpts of them in their historical writing (Cicero, Titus Livius, etc). Today, it is possible to identify in these twelve tables the official commencement of what is known as the Roman Law. The laws were written with a succinct style, and they were not comprehensive of all the laws necessary in each sector of the Roman society.

The Tables were a sort of bill of rights, which became for centuries the readable and easy-to-memorize manifesto for the plebeian classes. For instance, by the publication of the Twelve Tables, the system of clienteles became official. That is, a patron was to have under his protection his own clients and if he damaged a client he would be considered forever cursed.²²

For Rome, the Law of the Twelve Tables signed the concrete passage from the monarchic state, to the republican state. As I said before, previous to the Tables, Rome had already become a republic, but the power was concentrated only in the hands of aristocratic families, who could be part in the Senate. From now on, the Senate had the participation of plebeian representatives, and the duties covered by each member were exercised collegially and for limited time, to guarantee justice and integrity.

Society

For the first part of the republican phase the power was completely held by the aristocratic class. The poorer classes were obliged to participate in the wars that the Senate was pursuing, even though they were not included in the distribution of new conquered territories. While in war, they were also forced to leave their activities as farmers or craftsmen, which often resulted in exponentially increasing debts and risks of becoming slaves to pay off the debts. The situation was unsustainable for the plebeian classes and they started to rise up through social and political unrests. The results of the insurrections brought to the institution of a new function in the Senate. That is, two

²² Barberis, Carlo, *Storia Antica e Medievale*, (Milano: Edizioni Principato, 1997).

judges, the so-called Plebeian Tribunes, were recognized with an official role in the Senate. They had the power to veto laws that could damage the plebeian population,.

A crucial change in the society, which greatly influenced the passage from the republic to the empire, has been the position of the roman military forces, which had enormously increased their power since the application of the reform attributed to the notorious sixth king of Rome, Servius Tullius. This reform can be summarized as follows, the society was divided into six classes, and the presence in the army of each class was subjected to each class wealth (while before, it was just compulsory for everybody). Because of this defined division, each class needed to have its own representative in the government and its own right to discuss laws and policies; hence, each class gained electoral power.

The six classes were: first class that of the cavalry, the second, and the third were both of the infantry (the difference between them was based on possessions and type of arms used in the field). The fourth class was that of auxiliary troupes; the fifth class was that of light-armed soldiers, and the sixth was the class of the proletarians. Of course, the first class had more political influence, and for this reason from this moment, the relation between politics and military increased in importance. From now on the republic was identified as oligarchic, and not anymore as aristocratic.

Table 3 represents the division of classes that formed the army. This is according to the tradition that wants the king Servius Tullius to be the first to promote this reform called of the Centuria – subdivision.²³ Table 3 summarizes the type of armament each class was allowed to wear and what was the number of soldiers that each Centuria –

²³ Barberis, Carlo, *Storia Antica e Medievale*, (Milano: Edizioni Principato, 1997).

subdivision, needed to provide once asked to go to war. The numbers in Table 3 should help identify the political power that each class had in the decision-making process, and should also help a better understanding of why the republic slowly became oligarchic.

Table 3.

Class	Centuria	Arms
1st	98 (18 cavalry 80 infantry)	Helmet, shield in bronze, armor, leg-protection, lance and sword
2nd	20 infantry	Helmet, big shield, leg-protection, lance and sword
3rd	20 infantry	Helmet, shield, lance and sword
4th	20 auxiliary troupes	Lance and javelin
5th	30 light- armed soldiers	Sling and stones
6th	5 proletarians	Nothing besides their bodies

Table 3. Division of classes to form the army

In different governments later, other divisions were also applied, but these were mainly based on the location of the territorial possessions of each class. These divisions were called Tributes Assembly. The peculiarity was that in the Tributes Assembly, aristocrats and plebeians that were living in the same area could be reckoned together. These assemblies had the power of electing magistrates of lower ranks like Aediles or Quaestors, as Figure 3 shows.

Figure 3.

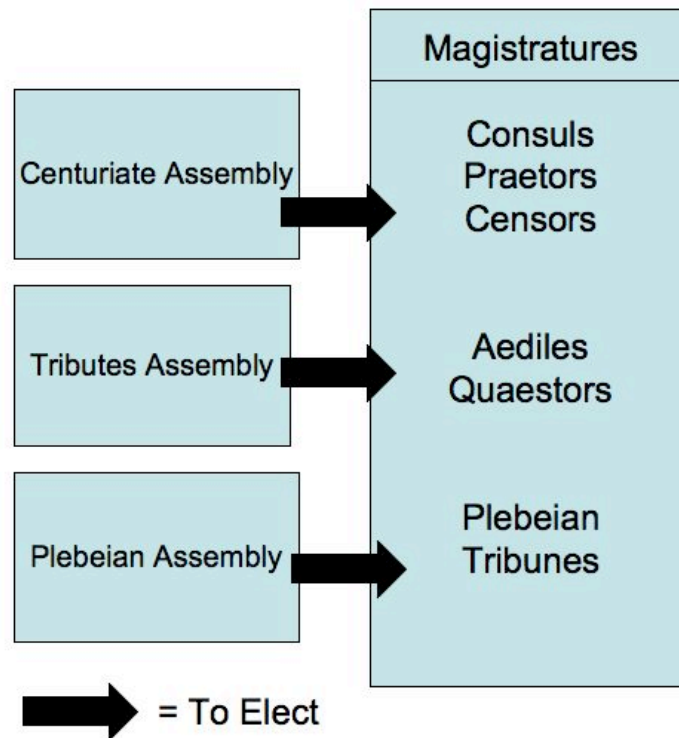


Figure 3. Various people's assemblies and their electoral power.²⁴

The internal division between classes was growing with time, and brought to the point where the stability of the state was weakened. Tribunes of the plebeians with time had managed to add to their veto power, the power of promoting new laws and reforms to alleviate the struggle of the lower classes. After the army reform, another group of people tried to get command and attention; that is, the group of the cavalry (*populares*, often supported by the proletarian). They were in contrast with the promoter of the aristocrats and the plebeians that had become rich with commerce and other activities (*optimates*,

²⁴ Barberis, Carlo, *Storia Antica e Medievale*, (Milano: Edizioni Principato, 1997).

supporter of the power of the Senate). Some important names characterized this period of political changes and fought for power between *populares* and *optimates*. The most important names will be those of Marius and Silla, whose influence led to the passage from the republic to the empire. The first was supported by the *populares* and the second was supported by the *optimates*. It became civil war between the two candidates and their followers, and the conflict represented the crucial moment when extremely charismatic individuals made their appearance on the political scene of the republic of Rome and changed its destiny forever: Pompeus, Crassus and Caesar.

In this context it is worth to focus on the last person, who unquestionably shaped the momentum from the republic to the empire: Julius Caesar. Caesar used a political approach different from that of the statesmen of the previous periods. He did not surrender to personal vendetta; on the contrary, he tried to be known for his magnitude and his wide and popular consensus. To do so, he enlarged the number of participants to the Senate from 600 to 900, admitting also people from the provinces, previous slaves that had gained back their freedom through good services and people from the new conquered territories. Caesar cleverly treated with each class in the way they wanted to be treated; that is, involving the lower classes to the decision-making processes and reassuring the rich that their private properties would not be affected.

In the year 48 B.C. Caesar was proclaimed perpetual dictator and emperor for life. For this reason, many were unsatisfied with this nomination, illegal in a republic state and Caesar's rivals organized a plot against him. On March 15 of the year 44 B.C. Caesar was stabbed 27 times in his chest. A fundamental change of Caesar's dictatorship was the relation he had established with the people in the provinces. Caesar granted roman

citizenship to many of the populations of the provinces and sped up the process of urbanization by building markets and cities in those areas, so that the new populations could feel to be part of Rome and contribute to his greatness.

Foreign Affairs

The power acquired by the military after the class reform gave to single generals of roman legions the authority of starting expeditions to new territories to achieve more power and wealth. Each new war was the expression and materialization of the internal struggle discussed above between classes or single individuals, which brought to the decay of the republic. Yet, one feature is worth mentioning in this context: the method utilized by the Romans in dealing with the new conquered territories. That is, Romanization by integration.

While in the second century B.C. China had become a unitary empire under the command of the first emperor Qin Shi Huangdi, republican Rome was pursuing these expansionistic policies in Europe and elsewhere. Romans troupes had reached Spain, many of the territories on the Mediterranean Sea, and had also arrived as far as Northern Africa and the Middle East. All the conquered territories became property of the state (the so-called *ager publicus*). Many of these territories became Roman colonies with a twofold objective: first, they were used to assign agricultural land to citizens (in fact, the term ‘colony’ in Latin means *to cultivate*), and second, they were strategic locations for Roman armies. The dwellers of the colonies were almost always considered Roman citizens.

To sum, the far-sighted policy the Romans applied to the new territories is sufficient to say that they gave to many of these populations the right to vote in the Roman Senate.

Empire: the evolution

The death of Caesar was supposed to bring back the real values of the republic; instead the republican state appeared weakened by Caesar's murder and sort of accelerated its process of decay. The faction who had killed Caesar hoped to get the support of the lower classes to start governing again; however, Caesar was well respected within the population. Hence, the party that sustained a renaissance of the republic lost all its power. It is in this environment that Octavian Augustus made his appearance in the political scene. He became the spokesmen for everybody who was tired of internal and personal conflicts and between factions, and tired of the indolence of the apparatus. Even though the juridical functions of Augustus were illegal for the republican state, the reforms that took place helped confirm his person as the highest charge of the state. He kept the basic republican institutions, like the Senate and the Magistratures; however, he reduced the number of participants and maintained only those who would support him. Augustus was able to obtain the title of *princeps*, or first citizen of Rome, which is one of the titles that will determine the identity of the third phase of Roman history, the Principate.

Augustus obtained the title of *princeps*, which is used to stress the political character of Augustus power. Nevertheless, he had also different responsibilities, and the other name with which his historical phase is usually known, the Imperial Phase, is because of another of his duties. The title of *imperator* (emperor, from Latin: commander,

victorious general) was the title that Augustus never renounced of. From Augustus ahead, every *princeps* also had the honorific title of *imperator* (emperor), and from here the definition of the imperial phase. In sum, Augustus *de facto* concentrated all the powers in his hands and instituted an empire, but without destroying the basic order of the republican state. In fact, he was an elected emperor.

When Augustus died in the year 14 A.D., his son, Tiberius, who was elected emperor, kept his father *de facto* position of princeps-imperator. At this point in history, the Senate only had a nominative role. However, it is important to remember that was still an organ of the empire structure. The approach of Augustus to the best typology of government needed for Rome was similar to that of Caesar. That is, to always express major attention and respect for the republican institutions and all Roman traditions, as they represented the foundation of the greatness of Rome.

The period after Augustus death, between the reign of Nerva (96 A.D.) and the reign of Commodus (192 A.D.), called the time of the Nervan-Antonian dynasty, is recognized as the most prosperous and powerful epoch of the Roman empire. The emperors kept the approach that was proper of Augustus, always looking at the past as glorious example, and never underestimate the power of the lower classes and population of the provinces; on the contrary, continuously favoring those classes to avoid social struggle and the empowerment of too influential senators that could threaten the stability of the empire²⁵.

²⁵ Barberis, Carlo, *Storia Antica e Medievale*, (Milano: Edizioni Principato, 1997).

China

Period

The period of interest in the comparison goes from the unification of China under one ruler (221 B.C.) to the end of the Han Dynasty (220 A.D.). As we have described in the first chapter, in the period before the unification, known as the period of the Warring States, China was divided into many kingdoms fighting one another for supremacy. The autonomy reached by the single states in the decadent period of the Eastern Zhou was lost with the promotion of a whole and unified China by King Ying Zheng. When King Ying Zheng, king of the state of Qin, managed to win over all the other warring states, he named himself Qin Shi Huangdi, literally means the first emperor, because his role was different from the role of any previous rulers and above those kings he had dethroned. He had initiated the conception of China transmitted through history for the following two millennia. That is, China became a centralized empire with a pyramidal and centralized structure.

Qin Shi Huangdi had had several advantages, which allowed his kingdom to become the unifier of China. First of all, Qin's territory covered a geographic position, part of today's Shaanxi and Sichuan provinces, which resulted strategically beneficial. It was protected in the east part by mountains and gorges, and also had easy access to the north China plain and to the central Yellow River valley. This position made Qin invulnerable to attacks, but favored Qin's intrusions in other kingdoms. Second, in the northern part, the kingdom was also sided by territories where non-Chinese tribes were living; for this reason, the army of Qin was used to combat against them, habits that made

the Qin's army strong and prepared for violent wars. Third, the favorable geographic location also helped the economy of Qin because its territories were in the most fertile area of China, and they were also rich of minerals and lumber. Fourth, because of its economic advantages Qin was attractive for many immigrants looking for better life²⁶. Finally, because the king of Qin was renowned for his aggressive politics, his kingdom became very attractive for brilliant administrators in search of power and responsibility, as it was in the case of Li Su, who became the first counselor of Qinshi Huangdi (some scholars believed him to be the true *deus ex machina* of the Qin triumph)²⁷.

Figure 4.

²⁶ Hucker, Charles, O., *China's Imperial Past*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975).

²⁷ Bodde, Derk, *China's First Unifier, A Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as seen in the Life of Li SSu*, (Philadelphia: Hong Kong University Press, 1967).



Figure 4. China during the Period of the Warring States²⁸

Government organization

The organization of the government from the first Chinese empire (founded in 221 B.C.) was basically maintained the same also during the Han dynasty. The key point is the pyramidal structure of the government, which can be broadly divided into central government and provincial government (as it is also today). The emperor, who is the unique basis of authority and leadership, holds the highest position in the central government. As we have discussed before, since the first unifier, Qin Shi Huangdi, the

²⁸ Online source retrieved and accessed on March 15, 2007.

<http://brian.hoffert.faculty.noctrl.edu/HST165/04.Map.LateWarringStates.html>

power of the emperor was legitimized by the idea that supremacy was assigned to the emperor by the non-earthly authority recognized with Heaven. This belief authorized the emperor to ask for the absolute obedience and loyalty of every individual below him in the social structure; that is, everybody in the whole empire.

The unification advanced by the first emperor was not Qin Shi Huangdi's only contribution. The set of reforms that he promoted was what radically changed China's history. He promoted the new system of centralized administration and cultural unification, characteristics still in use in contemporary China. The emperor believed that the sort of autonomy that states acquired during the Eastern Zhou had been a political disaster. For this reason, the most important change he made was aimed at the fragmentation of the territories of local aristocratic families. Since this moment, at a father's death, the territory could not go only to the primogenital son, but it was to be divided between all the sons. The result was a great fragmentation of even the biggest territories, to avoid that any of these smaller states could rise up against the central government.

Moreover, the empire was divided into thirty-six commanderies, each subdivided into counties. Each commandery had a civil governor, a military commander and an imperial inspector. They were all centrally appointed and earned fixed salaries. The real reform to stress here is the refusal of Qinshi Huangdi to support any policy that would mean going back to any kind of separate power and old feudalistic structures. From now on the Chinese empire will have a uniformly centralized jurisdiction. The commanderies of the past are today's provinces (*sheng* 省) and counties (*xian* 县). The cultural

unification was pursued primarily through the standardization of written language, currency, weights and measures, and legal code.²⁹

The central government possessed the highest power and had a tripartite structure, mainly maintained also in the Han period, in which the emperor was at the apex. Directly below him there were the three dukes (*sangong*) responsible for the various sections of the whole empire. On the other hand, nine dignitaries directed the administration of the imperial reality. Their tasks were to administrate the ceremonies, palace treasury, imperial guards, and the administration of the capital.

An approximate representation of the structure of the empire is illustrated by the following figure, which should help visualize the pyramidal shape of the structure of the Chinese first empire, and of those that followed.

Figure 5.

²⁹ Bodde, Derk, “The State and Empire of Ch’in,” in *The Cambridge History of China* Vol. 1, by Twitchett, Denis and Michael Loewe eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

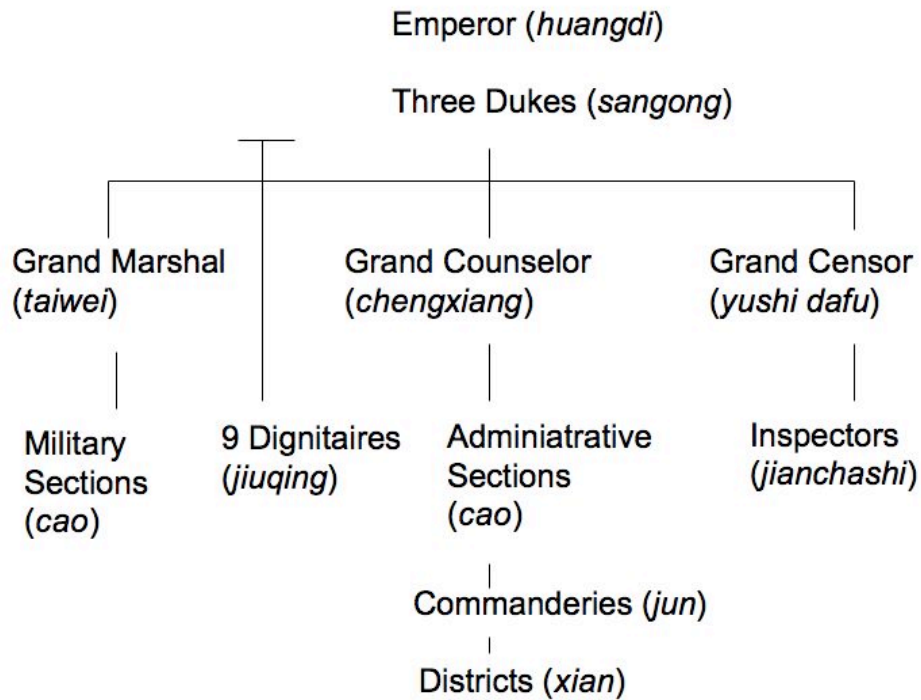


Figure 5. Structure of the State during Qin Dynasty³⁰

The administration of the Han dynasty, especially under the time of the emperor Wudi (140 B.C. – 9 A.D.), changed the role of the Grand Counselor, who was sort of deprived of part of his authority. It was instituted a Secretariat, directly dependent from the emperor, which had one director, one vice-director and six other members, each responsible for a specific section (*cao*). In addition, the role of the nine dignitaries changed a little bit. Before they were mostly responsible for the facts of the imperial house, while from the Han time, they achieved major power and became responsible for

³⁰ Sabbatini, M. and Paolo Santangelo, *Storia della Cina*, (Bari: Laterza, 2004), pp. 133-147.

nine actual ministries: rites, treasury, agriculture and taxation, imperial guards, tributary relations, imperial family, justice, imperial stables, and court ceremonies. Moreover, the tasks of the Grand Censor went under the power of an inspector, directly dependent from the emperor. Lastly, to districts and commanderies were added small reigns and marquisates, also under the direct control of the imperial family.

The nominations for each one of these roles were supposedly based on merit; however census, familiar connections and a complicated system of recommendations was the foundation of the Chinese bureaucracy. To better shape the perfect functionary, the Han emperor Wudi created the Imperial University, which had the goal of educating the next generation of bureaucrats with solid ideals of the meaning of centralization and capacity to preserve the imperial authority.

Laws

Previous to the Qin Empire, we find three different codes of laws, which included fix and public law. One was of the state of Qin and was inscribed on bronze in the year 513 B.C.³¹ The core content of the code regarded just criminal law, but in any case it was utilized by the successors as the foundation for the later development of Legalist philosophy. The Legalist's thought prospered before the unification of China, and was endorsed by Qin Shi Huangdi, who unified China with it. Legalism nurtured a culture of authority through fear, in order to strengthen the power of the state. As a consequence, laws were for the government mere instruments to keep absolute control. Law was

³¹ Bodde, Derk, *China's First Unifier, A Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as seen in the Life of Li SSu*, (Philadelphia: Hong Kong University Press, 1967).

established to serve the state and was not meant to serve the people, who also had no voice in the making of the laws.

The essence of the laws during the Qin period, which was relatively kept during the time of the Han dynasty, was as follows. According to the evil nature of the human being, which seeks only personal advantage and act based on self-interests, there is only one resolution that can stop them from misbehaving: the concern of being severely punished³². Hence, with the Qin dynasty the desire for rewards and the fear of punishment became the only solution capable of obtaining people to lean toward good. When the Han dynasty gained power, the openly cruel Legalist philosophy of the previous period, sort of melted back with the basic beliefs of the Confucian teachings of Xunzi, according to which the evil part of the human being can be rectified through education. In a passage of the *Shi Ji*, Sima Qian writes that:

After the establishment of the Han Dynasty, the government abolished all cruel laws, eliminating those that were superficial but maintaining those that were basic and essential. The law was so lenient that it could be compared to a fishing net with huge holes through which the largest fish could easily escape. Yet the government functioned better and better each day, and there were no dishonest dealings among government officials. Meanwhile people enjoyed peace and security. It seems clear that the best way to govern lies in the cultivation of virtues rather than imposition of harsh punishment.³³

³² Bodde, Derk, *China's First Unifier, A Study of the Ch'in Dynasty as seen in the Life of Li SSu*, (Philadelphia: Hong Kong University Press, 1967).

³³ Li, Dun J., *The Essence of Chinese Civilization*, (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1967).

Nevertheless, it is very hard to believe that Sima Qian would not be influenced by imperial pressure when writing such sentences, or that his work was not retouched in later periods, since we know that he was condemned to castration for having made a positive remark about a man accused of being a villain by the Chinese imperial law.

What is more likely is that government officials would use the same rhetoric used by Sima Qian in the passage above, to promote their power, but once reached the position of officials, they would heartlessly participate in inhumane persecutions and enforcement of laws, being that the easiest and safest way to secure their authority. In sum, the legalist philosophy after the end of the Qin dynasty was modified exteriorly, in order to be more acceptable and humane. Confucianism, with its ideas of attentions to customs and personal judgment apparently replaced the crude legalist set of laws. In practice, legal processes were not systematized, but left to arbitration within clan and villages, where power and wealth always acted as ultimate ruler.

Society

The main set of values that openly persisted, and evolved in the long period of following dynasties is Confucianism. China is defined as a Confucian society. This label is to summarize the imprint of the society based on the Confucian idea of harmony. Harmony in the Confucian teaching has to be preserved by observing certain reciprocal relationships and responsibilities. Confucius established an ethical and moral system that governs all relations. The family was the basic unit of society. There are five great relationships: kindness in the father and obedient devotion in the son, gentility in the

eldest brother and humility and respect in the younger, righteous behavior in the husband and obedience in the wife, humane consideration in elders and deference in juniors, and benevolence in rulers and loyalty of ministers and subjects. A specific hierarchy is observed that places highest importance on rank and age in all interactions.

This basic concept of family is what Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China, wanted to exploit when he tried to fragment the society into small family nucleuses. He wished to avoid that any family other than the imperial family could never become strong enough to oppose his reign to his own. However, the family structure had become already an intrinsic feature of the Chinese society and Qin Shi Huangdi did not manage to diminish the significance of family relations and did not stop oppositions to his reign.

In the society there were two certainties, one linked to the other, the family structure was unmistakable and the emperor was above everything, especially laws. At this point, we can consider the more “secular” arrangement of the society. Chinese society was basically divided into those who took part in the administration of the central government and those who did not. As we have explored in the structure of the empire, there were senior officials close to the emperor and minor officials for different ministries. Moreover, there were the categories of officials who acted in the provinces. Each official had a rank that was differentiated with ribbons of different color (gold, silver, bronze etc.)³⁴

The differences in the society were not only based on census. This is proved by the position occupied by the merchants. They covered the lowest position in the society,

³⁴ Loewe, Michael, *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China, During the Han Period 202*

BC – AD 220, (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1968), pp. 29 – 53.

even when circulation of money and commerce had given them great opportunity of becoming wealthy. The real rich were those who could buy land, and not just trade commodities, because land was considered the true luxury.

Between the merchants and the officials there were the non-officials, which in quantity were way more numerous than the officials, but had a much lower status in the society, almost inexistent. The only bond for these outsiders remained the family relationships. Those were the small landholder, the peasants and farmer working under large estate owners, or laborers.

Since imperial government was based on the concept of rewarding exemplary services, while punishing those that were unfavorable for the empire, each reward became standardized. There were twenty types of order, and the non-officials could reach only until the eighth degree. The higher degree was that of the ‘marquis’ and it was hereditary. The absolute lower section of the society was that occupied by the slaves. Slaves were never more than one per cent of the population³⁵, they were used for a multitude of employments, but they could not ameliorate their rank in the society.

Finally, everybody in the twenty-layers-order were obliged to give one year service to imperial labor or imperial military force. In theory this obligation was to last for one year, but if the war lasted longer, they could not leave their duty. The military service was mandatory for every one submitted to the authority of the emperor; however, official functionaries were exonerated.

³⁵ Loewe, Michael, *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China, During the Han Period 202*

BC – AD 220, (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1968), pp. 58 – 60.

Foreign Affairs

The name of China in Chinese (*Zhongguo* 中国) means ‘middle kingdom’. It is not a coincidence that historically, the Chinese thought of their civilization as the center of the refined world. In fact, they defined ‘barbarous’ all the population occupying territories not under the control of the Chinese empire. Pye synthesizes brilliantly this Chinese millenary self-recognition: “Without undue exaggeration it can be said that an awareness of the greatness of Chinese civilization, together with an appreciation of the distinctiveness of “Chineseness,” is possibly one of the few cognitions shared by nearly the entire human race.”³⁶

When the emperor Wudi of Han conquered the territory of the modern China and also arrived to Vietnam, Mongolia, Manchuria and Korea instituted a diplomatic organism that is known as tributary system. The rulers of the occupied territories could maintain their authority, as long as they admitted to cover an inferior position in respect to the Chinese empire. These territories would become China’s vassals, would offer homage each year to the Chinese emperor, by sending a delegation to the capital with every sort of local product and sumptuous gifts.

Empire: the evolution

The organization of the government from the first Chinese empire (founded in 221 B.C.) was basically maintained as the same also during the Han dynasty. The key point to understand is the pyramidal structure of the government, which can be broadly

³⁶ Pye, Lucian, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 50 – 53.

divided into central government and provincial government (as it is also today). The emperor, who is the unique basis of authority and leadership, holds the highest position in the central government. As we have discussed before, since the first unifier, Qinshi Huangdi, the power of the emperor was legitimized by the idea that supremacy was assigned to the emperor by the non-earthly authority recognized with Heaven. This belief authorized the emperor to ask for the absolute obedience and loyalty of every individual below him in the social structure; that is, everybody in the whole empire. Nevertheless, there is one thing to be noted, each dynasty in China started as the result of a civil war or foreign invasions, and the emperor was always a single winner that eliminated the others and resisted. Actually, it was with the founder of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang, considered of poor origins and without education, that the role of the ‘mandate of heaven’ was formally conferred (202 B.C.)³⁷.

The imperial system became increasingly more sophisticated in the following eras, from the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 220) to the Tang Dynasty (唐代 618 – 907 A.D.). Throughout the dynasties, the Legalist concept of rule by law (opposite to the western idea of rule of law) became the means of statecraft *par excellence*. Early Confucians had criticized rule by law, proposing the achievement of harmony between the society and the will of Heaven by adherence to ethical principles. The structural complexity reached by the Chinese empire in the centuries following the formation of the first empire saw even Confucian officials working on the codification of precise laws. Confucians permeated laws with Confucian philosophy. For this reason, the original

³⁷ Loewe, Michael, *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China, During the Han Period 202 B.C. – A.D. 220*, (London: Batsford, 1968).

equality typical of the Legalist concept of law went lost through the application of the law according to the grade of relationships between the parties, i.e., it was considered a terrible offense when a son murdered a father, but the opposite was not true.³⁸

Conclusive remarks

The comparison of the two empires showed us that in many features the two empires had different organization. To conclude this section it is worth mentioning four of the most eloquent of these dissimilarities, which I extrapolated from four of the features that I have analyzed in each empire. That is, government organization, laws, society and foreign affairs. Each one of these distinction resulted in a peculiar characteristic inherited by the Western modern society and Chinese contemporary societies and their political settings. I acknowledge the undeniable existence of nuances that can be opposed to the following discussion; for this reason, I intend to make clear that the comparison is made through a wide generalization of the results of this research.

First, talking about government organization, the major distinction is that the electoral system has always been at the foundation of Roman political world, even when the organization was mainly monarchic or imperial. In China, on the other hand, there has never been an election, but power and authority has always been determined mostly through family relations, even tough a meritocratic system was present.

³⁸ Hucker, Charles, O., *China's Imperial Past*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 149 – 164.

Second, the set of laws that Rome instituted with the Law of the Twelve Table and developed throughout the centuries was expression of requests from every section of the society. Because of the electoral representation that each class could enjoy, the laws were stipulated to make (at least in theory) everybody equal before the law. The western concept of law evolved from these prerequisites. It is not a coincidence that with the expression of Roman Law, in a broader sense, we indicate the judicial system developed in Europe all the way through the 18th century. Chinese laws were coded to serve the state and not the people; for this reason, still today it is difficult to discern a systematic and efficient Chinese judicial system. As we have seen, most of the cases were and has been decided on the base of personal judgments and personal relations.

Third, the society of Rome was extremely flexible. Plebeian could become rich and live close to the nobles; slaves could serve honestly and be awarded with freedom and could be given the chance of advancing in the society. In China the ranks were almost immobile and the levels in the society were to be firm and respected until death. From here resulted the extreme power of the classes in command.

Fourth, regarding the relation with foreigner, Rome integrated and helped developing the population of the new territories, granting citizenship and respecting customs; in exchange, the new territories were subjected to the same laws and the same rules of all the other Romans. China never assimilated the new population without changing their deep cultural aspects. China always maintained the pride of being The civilization, always imposing its Chineseness to everything it could. This Chineseness is also possible to be characterized as that set of institutions, norms and values created during the Qin dynasty; the same imposition of Chineseness happened also to the

Western ideas of socialist revolution through the well-known model Socialism with Chinese characteristics.

CHAPTER 3

THE P.R.C. ERA

The concept of authority in China

All the way through this work, we have tried to assert the intrinsic relation that each individual has with higher authority in the Chinese civilization, since the creation of the first empire and the Qin system; being the higher authority means a father, a husband, a government official, or the emperor in person. These relations are fixed within a conduct that requires total respect and fear; all this was not only possible because of Confucian social structures, but was also legitimized and systematized through the legalist use of force, and after marked as a sign of the uniqueness of China. This result was achievable because of, nominally, the postulate that the highest goal was the harmony and the peace of the whole world. But the foundation for such centralized power relationship rests more on the skilled use of force and the monopoly of resources in the hands of the top ruler, the emperor.

This tremendously clever mechanism, spread bottom up in the Chinese society, is applied by Lucian Pye to evaluate the Chinese perception of authority and evaluate the reasons behind the modern application of it. We will use his approach to clarify today's Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) power. In his book *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*, Lucian Pye describes the traditional Chinese family structure, attributing to it great influence in the socialization of the whole nation. Pye investigates how the modernization

process has changed Chinese peoples' relations with government and policy. Pye touches three important points: the family structure, the Confucian accent on shame, from where the whole Chinese civilization has been also identified as a culture of shame, and the need for a strong authority. I consider the first two points as the foundation for the third point; they lead to the explication of the need for a strong authority, justified only in an entirely Chinese context, and still applicable today.

The first point is the traditional family structure, which embeds the strong value of filial piety. For centuries this value has compelled Chinese to accommodate dutifully the rough treatments of authoritarian fathers. The child could not act against the authority of the father; hence, because of the patriarchal structure of the family, the child could not act against the authority of the whole family. The Confucian concept of shame was crucial in the education of the children. A Chinese child should prefer to suffer silently, not interfering with the teaching of the family, because the fear to feel humiliated for the errors he could commit, was worse than any will to make his own ego prevail³⁹.

As mentioned before, Pye's second point is the use of the sense of shame. The horror of shame is veiled, but omnipresent in family relations. This diffuse attitude of shame has formed the character of the Chinese people toward all authorities, paternal, family, and government. Confucianism wants relations between people to be well designed and strictly immobile. If the proper, virtuous, filial relations were respected, there would be harmony in the world. The respect for the authority is as strong as the result of any Chinese being able to accept the authority's will and decision, even when it

³⁹ Pye, Lucian, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 74.

seems unfair and unjustified. This has shaped in China the powerful belief that self-cultivation, along with the cultural ideal of harmony, is extremely efficacious, to the extent that self-cultivation and moral control become virtues. Control of emotions, ability to act in perfect harmony with the fixed set of rules, and in separation from the sentiments that usually bring shame, is the right way to contribute to stability.

The third point expressed in Pye's book describes the need for authority. Strictly related to the previous two arguments, the need for authority is explained as a consequence of the hierarchical family structure, and the fear of shame. From this sense of shame Chinese should derive self-control, and this self-control is fundamental to maintain harmony within the structure. Nevertheless, the authoritarian father is also a paternalistic figure, and this perception toward the father leads the Chinese people to the expectation of a similar relation with the government. According to Pye, self-control is complemented with the awareness that if self-control were not to work, there should still be a strong external authority capable of imposing discipline, thus bringing everything back to harmony. This concept is expressed by the Chinese conscious demand for a competent and effective authority. In sum, the main idea is that if the system breaks, and harmony is compromised, only establishing new form of authority, for the sake of harmony and stability, could stop the raise of any kind of rebellion or aggression.⁴⁰

To the significant three points treated by Pye, I would add an essential characteristic that seems only implied in Pye's whole argument. That is, the role Legalism played in the building of the relations with power and authority. I believe the

⁴⁰ Kallgren, Joyce, "The Spirit of Chinese Politics. Review", *The American Political Science Review* 3 (1969): 930-931.

sense of shame has been promoted especially through the fear of being punished. Otherwise, the following sentence of Confucius would be the sole and optimal representation of the ties with power, and the toughness of the Qin system would reveal itself weak and ineffective. Confucius says: “If laws led the people, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame. If they were led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good”.⁴¹ This ideology became the spoken virtue behind the actualization of the system of punishment and rewards toward the centuries, and the aware or unaware compliance of the people with this system.

After discussing the need for authority, Pye explains a crisis of authority in the transition period from the end of the Empire, passing by the rise to power of the Communist Party to the Cultural Revolution. He describes the end of the Qing Empire as a period troubled with instability, caused by the lack of a powerful government, and a tremendous need to stabilize the command of the country. The period is identified as the transition to modernization, whereas modernization is seen as a direct challenge from the West to Chinese authority. The short passage throughout the ineffective democratic regime, from 1911 to 1916, showed China its own backwardness. The following attempts, directed by the national authority, to reach modernization, went to affect the strong power

⁴¹ Chan, Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963).

of the local authority. This caused discontent at the local level, carrying also a sort of de-legitimization of the already weak central power, and a serious vacuum of authority.⁴²

In the Confucian setting of the world, the harmony has to be maintained at every level of personal relationship. For this reason, if one of the links is loosening, or missing, there is right for revolution and disorder. In addition to Pye's interpretation of the Confucian missing link that creates chaos, I believe it is vital to remember how each dynasty started, under what circumstances, and based on what type of behavior. That is, was it based on the behavior of virtuous, self-educated, Confucian men or built on plots, pragmatic murders, meditated eliminations and pursue of absolute power? Chinese historiography likes to tell us that each new dynastic cycle started based on the will of Heaven, that non-earthly and wise entity that has shaped Chinese political characteristics since the mythological emperors.⁴³ Yet, the practical act of elimination of the old guard, the official investiture and the justification of the whole process could not be in place without that supreme power and strength that legal measures had offered to each new commander of imperial families.

Finally, Pye argues that only with the advent of the Communists was the vacuum of authority, at the beginning of the 20th century, completely filled. Under the Communist regime societal behavior was apparently modified, since the new regime seems to grant the new generations, once reached their adulthood, opportunities to express their dissents and their rage. However, I deem important to stress that Chinese

⁴² Pye, Lucian, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 72.

⁴³ Bertuccioli, Giuliano, *La Letteratura Cinese*, (Milano: Sansoni, 1968).

children are still taught to control their emotions when facing their parents, and to fear the shame whether disobeying. For this reason, I accept the definition of vacuum of authority replaced with the authority of the CCP, but what I judge crucial is the fact that the procedure to get to the New Chinese Empire, the Socialist Empire, did not differ much from ancient dynastic revolution; that is, death, uprising, unclear appointment of new power, and harsh clutch over ordinary people.

Two eras in the mirror

This section is a practical exercise to clarify to what extent the revolution of the CCP has only been a façade transformation, built on a structure that dreadfully resemble that of the ancient empire. It is also possible to disentangle similarities that appear like a humorous trick of nature. However, in substance, China allows them to occur because of the astonishingly robust continuity and unbroken historic tight between present and past proper of every aspect of Chinese records.

The following tables are attached to illustrate a comparative exercise realized while analyzing the ideals, philosophies and facts that brought to the formation of the first centralized empire. The tables should help visualize a structural continuity in the basic political division of power in China since ancient times, and the roots of modern China political arrangements. I titled this exercise: “two eras on the mirror”, because I found many similarities in the Chinese organization of China in the second century B.C. and in the 21st century A.D.

Figure 6.

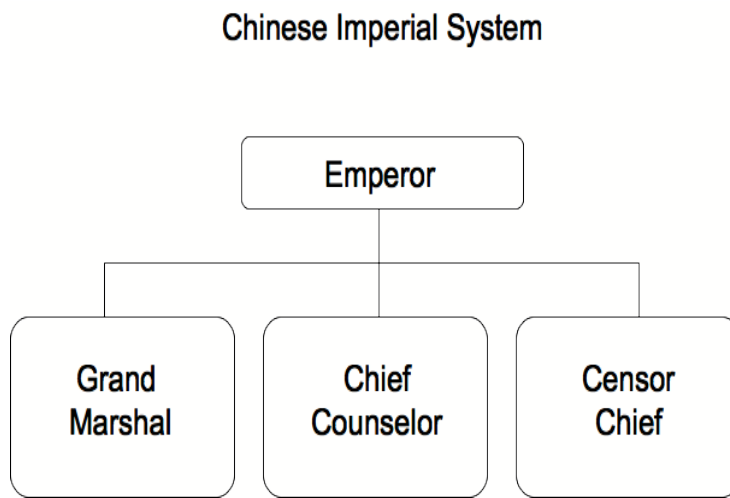


Figure 6. Representation of the political structure of the Chinese Imperial system

Figure 7.

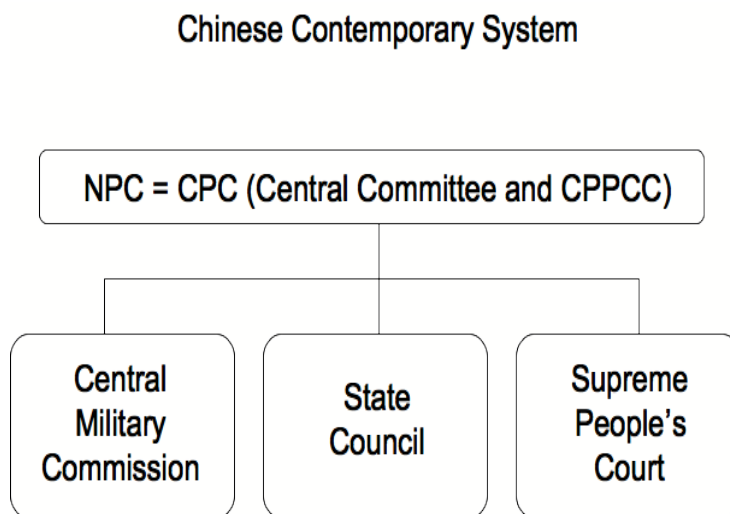


Figure 7. Representation of the political structure of the contemporary PRC system

The legitimacy of each dynasty, as the legitimacy of the PRC, has been based on the establishment of an official political philosophy (ultimately based on the winning of power struggle through the use of sheer force). The philosophy would influence each form of governance, which would contribute to the solidity of the political order. Chinese rulers have always believed that stability and unity in the social order are directly dependent on indoctrination of moral values and endorsement of official rules and regulations.⁴⁴ Accordingly, the Legalist doctrine imbued of Confucianism, which developed in the post Han-dynasty centuries, is the ancestor of the Communist doctrine (with Chinese characteristics) currently endorsed to maintain stability and legitimize the governance of the PRC.

In the Diagrams, the National People's Congress (NPC - the highest organ of state power in name) is compared with the authority of the emperor. In Diagram 2., after the NPC tag I put an equal sign to indicate that the difference between the NCP and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is paltry. In other words, even if the components of the Standing Committee of the NPC represent: (1) the Communist Party; (2) other political parties and patriotic and democratic personages not affiliated to any political party; (3) social organizations of workers, youth and women; (4) the People's Liberation Army; and (5) ethnic minorities each with a population more than a million,⁴⁵ the real power and

⁴⁴ Fewsmith, Joseph, "Institutions, Informal Politics, and Political Transition in China," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, No. 3, (March 1996), pp. 230 – 245.

⁴⁵ Chinese Government's Official Website, *The Standing Committee of the NPC*, http://english.gov.cn/2005-09/02/content_28456.htm, accessed December 1, 2006.

the actual control over the NPC is exercised by the members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CCP, which is composed of only nine members.

In ancient time, following down in the pyramidal structure of the Chinese political organization, there were Grand Marshal, Chief Counselor, and Censor in Chief, while today we have symmetrically the Central Military Commission, the State Council, and the Supreme People's Court. At this point, it suffices to notice that in both imperial epoch and in contemporary time the power continues to the local commanderies/provinces and counties.

Thus, the remark to make is that local governments in imperial China had almost the same structure and tasks of local government in modern era. The things that change are probably more on the surface – means and methods, rather than the essence. That is, local entities were strongly controlled by the central authority of the empire and were/are required to answer to a hierarchical structure that was captained before by the emperor and today by the NPC/CCP.

The assumption that NPC is subjugated to the CCP can become somewhat more evident if we analyze the structure of the Chinese Communist Party. It is arguable that there is a sort of system in the system; in other words, the organization of the Party is a sub-imperial-system in miniature. In Figure 8.⁴⁶, it is possible to envision the great influence of the CCP. The CCP has a structure that ranges from offices for the propaganda to departments on security, media control, foreign affairs, etc. In addition, the hierarchical arrangement sees the National Party Congress and the Central Committee as

⁴⁶ Chinese Government's Official Website, The Structure of the Chinese Communist Party <http://english.gov.cn.html>, accessed December 1, 2006.

the role of the NPC in the government, and the Standing Committee of the Politburo as the real holder of the true authority.

Figure 8.

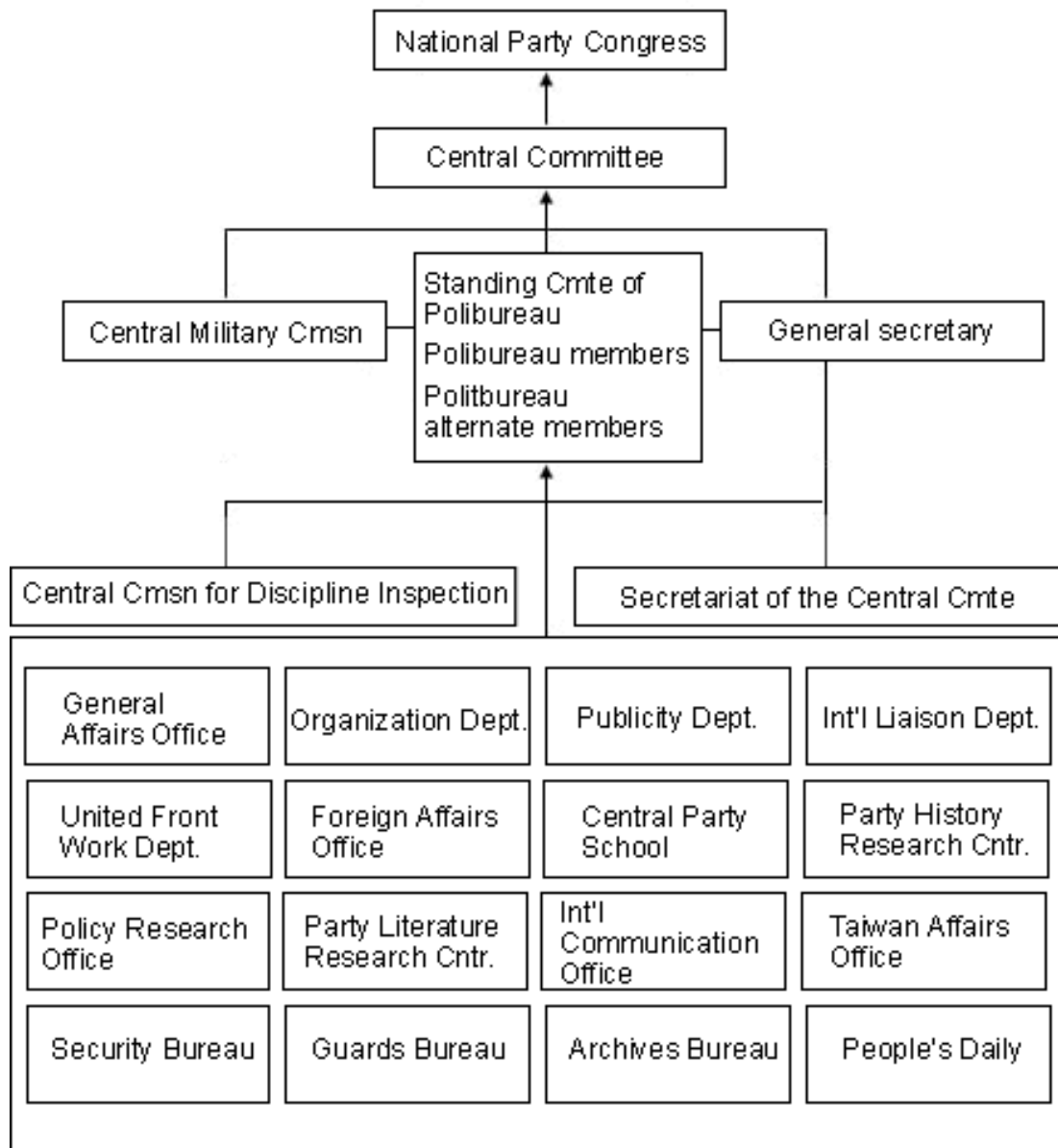


Figure 8. Structure of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

In sum, after discussing the foundation of the first centralized Chinese empire, from a political and organizational perspective, but also from philosophical and literary records, we reach the conclusion that the imperial system of ancient China is the result of a mixture of different beliefs, which have all contributed to the overarching aim of each of the actors that acquired power in China throughout the centuries. The ancient perception of the world as a single body in the cosmic universe, *Tianxia*, merged with the Legalist and the Confucian beliefs. This unique entity that is China, the central state, the middle kingdom, is formed by the fusion of Heaven and “all-that-is under-heaven”.

To conclude, I have analyzed the past of China to better understand the present. Each information reported in this essay is fundamental to understand China’s past and China’s origin, and to better debunk the logic behind the political interests of contemporary communist China, and to better speculate about the future path of China.

The New Chinese Empire

I would like to use now a rather psychological metaphor to discern how is it possible that China, after millennia, still has a pretty fix social structure and strangely this arrangement seems not to create explosively violent rebellions against the absolute authority. Therefore, I would suggest that as it is in a family with an authoritarian father and a weak mother, the sons are constantly afraid of the consequences of acting against the will of the father, so that silently and relentlessly obey to it, the same way happens in

China where the kings, the emperors of the past, or today's emperors – the supreme leaders of the CCP – have a role that is like that of an authoritarian father. The immediate question is, how is it possible that still today Chinese do not de-throne these 'kings'? One answer can be found in the fact that fathers are sort of imposed by heaven, and we, as humans, are not able to overthrow the immaterial force of heaven. In other words, nobody can pick his own father, and it is fate that puts us in the families we grow in, there is no chance of changing this aspect. Sure, we can leave the family, repudiate our origins, vindicate abuses and cruelties, but we cannot change the blood inside us. It all comes back to the justification of power due to the Mandate of Heaven. Marxism-Leninism has taken off the twentieth century's Mandate of Heaven.

The mandate of heaven is the expression of fate, and nobody can prescind from the caprices of fate. Not surprisingly the exact translation of the Chinese word for mandate of heaven, 天命 *tianming*, is fate. We can affirm that the principle of the mandate of heaven, (which includes the concepts of perfect harmony that can be reached between earth, heaven, and human kind; moreover, the idea of fixity of the universe and of the relations within it; finally, the perfect peace achievable with the command of the higher authority over *Tianxia*, the world, China), is the most authentic Chinese style of religiosity.

At this point it seems necessary to spend a few paragraphs discussing what are the limits of Chinese religiosity. The long history of China, represented by an unparalleled continuity and a relative geographical isolation, prevented China from having close contacts with other ancient civilizations of the world, as the European, the Indian or the Persian. Isolation and continuity, gave strength to the Chinese perception of its own

cultural superiority. The empire was the heart of the ancient Chinese Greatness. Century after century the Emperor, by heaven's mandate, was the only recognized authority. In the hands of the Emperor were all kinds of decisions. The emperor also controlled religion. Every appearance that different religions made in China was always controlled and determined by the Emperor's paramount power.

In the Chinese Empire, although appeared numerous religions, they were all strictly supervised and controlled by the strong Imperial state system. For this reason, the few periods in which religious beliefs actually spread out in China, were those when religions came from abroad. When Buddhism entered China from India, it imposed its presence strongly. Being aware of the tremendous power of the Emperor, and the Emperor's court during the ancient time, it is not impressive that Buddhism, firstly adopted by the aristocrats, became consequently the religion of state. Later, regular people, also, felt emancipation and great involvement with Buddhism. However, those experiences of conversion are now interpreted as a cause for the weakening of the New Empire. The Communist leadership took advantage of historical lessons. Religion is too powerful a mean, and it can easily be addressed against the established power. The Communist purging of any type of religion has concerned an intensification of social control over the beliefs and the spiritual life of the individual citizen.

In the CCP's orthodox narrative of modern Chinese history, religions are mostly seen as a product of foreign influence. The narrative about the history of the nineteenth century, the period recognized in China as the century of national humiliation (百年国耻 *bainian guochi*), from 1839 to 1949, interpreted religions as consequences of the colonialist expansionism of Europeans and Americans. In that century, trading cargos

were often shipped to China bringing priests and missionaries with them. The distinction between the goal of the trader and that of the missionaries was never made clear. The propaganda would just associate the arrival of barbaric individuals, who brought China, the Middle Kingdom, into decadence and ruin. Religion, as everything that came from abroad, was dangerous for the integrity of the Chineseness and for the national pride.

According to the assumption that beliefs were always shaped on the will of the head of the state, even though during the Chinese Communist revolution all kind of religions were prohibited, we can argue that the Party found a new belief to impose. The Communist ideas, the principle of Marxism-Leninism became religion. The regime reproduced norms inspired by the darkest periods of Christianity. The Communist Party became a religious sect that existed to spread the true faith. It had its Inquisition for the detention and punishment of heresy. It employed the weapon of excommunication-public criticism against disloyal and unorthodox members. It possessed in the writings of Marx, its infallible scriptures, and it revered in Lenin and Mao, if not gods, prophets at least.

The most serious problem of each one of the Chinese dynasties, and as one of them of the CCP as well, has always been the concern, of those in charge, of having to face instability. Instability can be feared with dreadful terror, if the reasons leaders stay in power is the mandate of heaven (being God's will, the party's will, or the heaven's will). As a consequence, the most instable periods in Chinese history happened when a substitution in the leadership occurred, or when a leader dies. As during the empire, every

time a succession occurred, it was time of conflicts, maneuver, factions and murder⁴⁷, almost the same is true for the succession in the P.R.C. era.

Legitimacy is the key requisite to govern with a credible authority, and consequently obtain stability. This is true both in democratic countries and autocratic countries. The huge difference is that in a democratic country the role of whoever is above us is, at least in theory, managed by a meritocratic system and electoral processes. The election procedure is not existent in autocratic societies. Hence, never an election has been held in China, and while it is quite logical for an empire not to practice elections (even though the Roman Empire was based on votes of the Senate), it has not been the same for the Republic of China (1911-1916), or the government, or dictatorship of the People that is currently in power. In fact, the people of China had never had influence in the choice of none of their leaders. Ordinary Chinese people have lived with no space for questions or argument for centuries, thank to the justification of the harmonious and peaceful *Tianxia*, through the establishment of a savvy authority who would do only the best for the population, the belief that a government acts as a father, and with the idea of unconditioned respect for the father at the highest commanding position.

There has been a perfect and ingenious equilibrium between the virtuosity of the Confucian-Communist-Egalitarian utopia and the strong brake imposed to supervise the society. The architect of this purely Chinese policy making is a genius, and this genius is identified with that first emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, who is responsible for the beginning of this contradictory and perfect system of dominance. Contradiction is the word and the

⁴⁷ Terrill, Ross, *The New Chinese Empire. And What it Means for the United States*, (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2003), pp. 78-80.

environment that everyone who is involved with the study of China has to encounter on books, or in reality. Ross Terril summarizes the oscillation between Legalism and Confucianism in this way: “But, a root, Legalism was the iron scaffolding of the Chinese empire; Confucianism was the silken costume”.⁴⁸ This sentence is applicable for market economy and socialist economy, (cohabiting in China); pragmatism and idealism, (see Deng and Mao’s doctrines); extreme poverty and extreme prosperity (accentuated in the last decade for the modernization process developed by the CCP itself); freedom of religion in the constitution and lack of freedom in the reality; and so on and so forth. In sum, contradictions bring uncertainty, which bring instability and make the leaders be scared, so that they need to never loose the grab on the people.

In the above-cited set of parallels I would like to underline a small group of primordial parallels, to confirm the thesis of resemblance and continuity if Chinese history. That is, the first Han emperor, Liu Bang, was a man of humble origins. The same thing is true for the first emperor of the New Chinese Empire, Chairman Mao Zedong. They both started a dynasty that loudly rejected the brutality of the previous commander in chief but obtained power through violence. In addition, both promoted the doctrine of the Moral Way to govern the middle kingdom, Liu Bang exploiting the principles of Confucianism, Mao Zedong applying Marxism-Leninism as guide of the moral and virtuous path toward “unity and stability”.⁴⁹ Lastly, both ‘emperors’ believed that there

⁴⁸ Terrill, Ross, *The New Chinese Empire. And What it Means for the United States*, (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2003), p. 72.

⁴⁹ Terrill, Ross, *The New Chinese Empire. And What it Means for the United States*, (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2003), p. 126.

was only one Son of Heaven, because the world cannot have two Suns, and that when the grip on the ideas vacillated, there would always be the strength of the law, and the sword. Ultimately, they both took move from the teaching of the initiator of the Chinese way of governance, Qinshi Huangdi. Again I will use a quote from Ross Terrill that clearly summarizes this notion of governance: “In the history of Chinese governance, Confucianism won its role only in symbiosis with its nemesis, the *realpolitik* philosophy of Legalism, the result was a brilliant tradition of statecraft.”⁵⁰

To conclude, let us play the sophistic game of creating syllogisms, which results easily rationalized for the numerous parallels recognizable in the Chinese historical path, Chinese development of ideas, and in the magnificent Chinese style of power preservation. A representation of the series of syllogisms I created is represented by the following Figure. 9.

Figure 9.

⁵⁰ Terrill, Ross, *The New Chinese Empire. And What it Means for the United States*, (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2003), p. 68.

Syllogism

- Fate = Mandate of Heaven
 - Mandate of Heaven = form of religion
 - Religion = an explanation of world order
 - Explanation of world order = Tianxia
 - Tianxia = religion
-
- Religion Is Something To Accept, To Have Faith on, It Is Not Something To Question about

Figure 9. Representation of Syllogism

Hence, we can argue that fate is equal to the mandate of heaven. Then, mandate of heaven is equal to the most authentic form of Chinese religiosity. Religiosity becomes what is necessary to explain the order of the world and to answer big existential questions. Therefore, this explanation of the order of the world in China is equal to the concept of *Tianxia*. Consequently, *Tianxia*, and any type of functional ideology embedded in it, becomes Chinese religion. Religion is something to accept and to have faith on. In other words, usually religious values are a matter of faith, more than something to question about. Hence, mostly everything related to the approval and the estimation of *Tianxia*, involving the texts used or the ideology exploited (after Confucianism and Legalism, we have Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, Jiang Zemin “Three Represents”, and Hu Jintao’s philosophy of the “Harmonious

Society” and the concept of “Eight Honors and Eight Shames”), everything has to be believed as the word of somebody from the highest, who allegedly desires only peace, unity and stability for his people.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The entire Chinese view of world order can be summarized with the word *Tianxia* and the concepts enclosed in this word. From a Chinese perspective, *Tianxia* (all-under-heaven) represents the blend of universal values possessed only by civilized populations; that is, the Chinese civilization. In the West the word *Tianxia* has been rendered simply with the word: empire. Nevertheless, the idea of Empire and also the word comes from the Roman Empire, which the Chinese interpret as the first power with goals of expansion, dominance and aggressive control.⁵¹ For this reason, with the term *Tianxia* in China is possible to recall several different items: historical facts, philosophical meanings, political developments, and else. In other words, *Tianxia* can be interpreted as the quintessence of the Chinese culture. For instance, *Tianxia* reminds of when the first emperor unified China under the command of one sole man. To describe these circumstances, it was used a sentence with four ideograms *Tianxia Yitong* (天下一统), which signifies the unification through conquest. However, besides the act of conquest, it is difficult to separate *Tianxia* from the whole Chinese idea of empire, which includes

⁵¹ Wang, Gongwu, “Tianxia and Empire: External Chinese Perspectives”, *Inaugural Tsai Lecture, Harvard University*, (May), 2006.

ideas as universalism, cosmology, superior moral authority, and legalism, which guided behavior and administrated power in the civilized world.⁵²

Today, the official translation of *Tianxia* in the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary is as follows: “land under heaven; realm; world *or* China; but *Tianxia* also indicates rule and domination”.⁵³ It is extremely significative that *Tianxia* is translated in China with the words: “world” and “China”, at the same time. This is possible because of the millenarian principle of the unique Oneness of China and the exclusive central position of China in the world as inimitable form of perfect civilization. Every Chinese who had studied history, or who simply has been educated by the elders of the family, grew protecting in his own mind this complex meaning of *Tianxia*. Even tough it is necessary to study thoroughly the history and the philosophy developed during the Chinese empire to be able to speculate about it; nonetheless, the vital source of the complex significance of *Tianxia*, and also of the approval that the concept of *Tianxia* maintained until modernity, is mirrored and nurtured by the structure of the society and the family itself. To the extents that, without the appreciation and the profound respect of the society, from the bottom upward, for the fix structures offered by *Tianxia*, it would probably not have become such a strong model for China. In other words, *Tianxia* had symbolized, and still symbolizes today, the range of assessments that goes from the authoritarian power of

⁵² Wang, Gongwu, “Tianxia and Empire: External Chinese Perspectives”, *Inaugural Tsai Lecture, Harvard University*, (May), 2006.

⁵³ Yuan Ling, *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian, The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, Chinese-English Edition*, (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2002), p. 1894.

each single head of Chinese family, to the legitimacy that the acceptance of the concept conveys, from the ancient formation of dynastic succession, to the administration of laws, as far as the organization of the society and the shaping of the mentality of each member of the unique Middle Kingdom.

***Tianxia* in Zhao Tingyang and other scholars**

In this section I will explore several authors who have treated or are currently discussing the revitalized subject of the concept of *Tianxia* (all-under-heaven). First of all, I will describe Zhao Tingyang's new book. Zhao Tingyang, Professor of Institute of Philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Social Science, has written a book titled: "The *Tianxia* system".⁵⁴ Zhao Tingyang summarizes the complex meaning of the Chinese concept of *Tianxia* with a tripartite grouping: the geographical aspect of *Tianxia*; that is, the earth or the whole land that is under heaven, which characterizes the first connotation; the second meaning would be that of *minxin* 民心, people's hearts, or else the "general will of all the people"⁵⁵, principle that encloses the idea of mandate of heaven; and the third meaning is the one that most interests us: the ethical and political meaning of *Tianxia*, in which *Tianxia* is proposed as a plausible alternative to the well-known

⁵⁴ Zhao, Tingyang, 天下体系, 世界制度哲学论, *Tianxia Tixi, Shijie Zhidu Zhexuelun*, 江苏教育出版社, Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chubanshe, (Jiangsu: 2005).

⁵⁵ Zhao, Tingyang, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-heaven' (Tian-xia 天下), *Social Identities*, Vol. 12. No.1, (January 2006), pp. 29-41.

“international theory” based on the settlement reached after the Thirty Years War, with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

The Peace of Westphalia is identified as the starting point of the division between nation-states that characterizes the contemporary international relations system. That is, the contemporary international order is based on the principles of state sovereignty and international law, whereas the idea of laws is directly related to the development of laws from the time of the Roman Empire first, and the British Empire later. In other words, the basic judicial system that formed the set of laws called international is founded on an idea of law as a principle governing action and procedures, which implies the existence of a sovereign authority and the obligation of obedience of all people subject to that authority. Hence, each body of laws functions as jurisdiction, which refers to the limits or to the territory within which the law applies. The various bodies of laws are divided into two main branches, Roman Law and Common Law; but between domestic and international. However, most of the international laws’ bodies are created by single states and for states. I will now explain how and why Zhao Tingyang in his book arrives to such a portentous conclusion; that is, to substitute this system with a new system based on *Tianxia*.

Zhao Tingyang believes that the concept of *Tianxia*, uniquely developed in China, is the ultimate representation of the utopia of the perfect world as a one-family-world. As we have discussed in previous chapters, the concept of family, and family relationships, has been the center of the Chinese society since the earliest times. Connected to the family there has been the idea of harmony within the world, where the highest fear was that of disorder (亂 *luan*). Zhao Tingyang says that the intertwining of these two ideas, family and harmony, is the core of Chinese Political Philosophy, which is based on the

twofold meaning of the *Tianxia* concept; that is, the political and the ethical meaning. Hence, the order of the world is then divided and at the same time fully enclosed in the two units that compose the *Tianxia* system. Thus, the *Tianxia* system includes a political and an ethical meaning, which are complementary and characterized as follows. The first, proceeds from the *Tianxia* (all-under-heaven) to states, and then to families, while the ethical process goes backward, it is represented by the course that sees family as firstly involved, then states, and lastly the all-under-heaven. Therefore, the *Tianxia* system is omni-comprehensive of the entire world in any directions and takes care of the order of the whole universe. This transversal feature of the *Tianxia* is what ensures to it its capability of reaching two characteristics considered fundamental by Zhao Tingyang and by China since ancient time to govern the world: consistency (一致性 *yizhixing*), and transitivity (传递性 *chuandixing*) in the political system, whereas the uniformity in the family relations, safeguard the ethical aspects intrinsic and necessary for the perfect realization of the *Tianxia* system. In this way, Zhao Tingyang gives reason for his definition of *Tianxia* as the mean for political legitimacy (政治合法性 *zhengzhi hefaxing*).⁵⁶ In other words, he considers legitimate and justified an empire, which should comprehend the whole world, since this would be built for the ultimate peace and harmony of the whole globe.

This simplistic and naïve perception toward the righteousness and the legitimacy of the empire is unfortunately the foundation of Zhao Tingyang alternative to

⁵⁶ Zhou, Lian, “天下体系的两条方法论原则， *Tianxia Tixi de liang tiao fangfalun yuanze*”, 中国书评, *Zhongguo Shuping*, (Beijing, 2006).

international relations theory. Zhao argues that the Chinese idea of all-under-heaven does not suggest geographical definite territories within certain borders; on the contrary, *Tianxia* proposes an a-temporal and a-spatial setting, which is supposed to represent the whole world. That is, *Tianxia* becomes the highest possible organization of the world; hence, becomes an institutional world.⁵⁷

Zhao Tingyang refers to the *Tianxia* as a cultural concept utilizable for the political mission that tries to give order to the whole world. His writings have plenty of references to globalization as something tangible and inevitable; for this reason, Zhao underlines the revolutionary need for a political administration of the world-ness of the globe. He believes we have reached now a stage beyond that of administration and institutionalization of the international framework. He argues that the actual division of the international order is limited and divisive, more than unifying, and gives the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) as an example, and we shall see why.

Since the 1970s, the most explanatory set of assumptions explaining the structure of the international order has been the Realist Theory. In the realist paradigm, nation/states are the primary actors and the basic independent political units of the international realm, which is anarchic. Each state's highest preoccupation is survival and also the maintenance of sovereignty. For these reasons, states act rationally to strategically defend their self-interests. Zhao criticizes the western viewpoint of approaching the study of the society. Therefore, he criticizes the subjectivity of all the western political theories and philosophies, while the Chinese focus more on each self as

⁵⁷ Zhao, Tingyang, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-heaven' (Tian-xia 天下), *Social Identities*, Vol. 12. No.1, (January 2006), pp. 29-41.

related to the Other. Here it comes back the idea of the fixity and reciprocity of the family and the societal structure. The consequence of this attention to the will and the interests of the Others, according to Zhao Tingyang, results in the determination of instituting a cultural empire and not imposing cultural imperialism.⁵⁸ Of course, the model used to oppose his new ideas to the Western rudiments of international theory is referred to the *Tianxia* system.

Zhao openly challenges the well-known Realist Theory arguing that in a globalized world the primary actor of the structure cannot be a nation/state anymore, whether the world is truly intentioned to reach global peace. Wang Gongwu, in a recent talk at Harvard University, explains how the development of the “New China” instead of making the new Chinese society ask for innovative ideologies, is becoming the cradle for the revival of antique and purely Chinese viewpoints:

The collapse of the imperial tradition has opened China to the world economy, to modern science, to superior systems of law and to alternative political cultures. This tradition may or may not be replaced by a modern nation-state. But the peoples of China have come out of rebellions, revolution and innumerable reforms with extraordinary vigor and determination. Can they simply be another nation-state? The sheer size of China may make this very difficult.

Or will the new knowledge in an age of globalization lead them to seek to recast the ideal of *Tianxia*?⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Zhao, Tingyang, “Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept ‘All-under-heaven’ (Tian-xia 天下), *Social Identities*, Vol. 12. No.1, (January 2006), pp. 29-41.

⁵⁹ Wang, Gongwu, “Tianxia and Empire: External Chinese Perspectives,” *Inaugural Tsai*

Zhao does not affirm that old Chinese empires have been the perfect example of a flawless global order; however, he asserts that the cultural ideals developed in China are the real possible alternatives to world governance. Only by applying the Chinese *Tianxia*'s basic meanings to contemporary world-order categories, would be possible to really understand the proposal he is making. Country as a unitary action should be discharged. States should become subordinate units of the highest authority of the world. What is needed is the acceptance of this holistic concept of the world, in which a supreme power would be the utmost legislator, which benevolently does not interfere in each country's deed, unless a war is pursued. This idyllic God-like world-emperor would strive for universal harmony and peaceful order.

Zhao acknowledges that unfortunately, we currently still live in a non-world, a failed-world in which self-interests still prevail over the needs of the Other. In order to change this, he believes everybody should study and appreciate the Chinese categories of family-state-world organization, because only through the processing of these models the whole world can recognize the absolute value of the Chinese superior *Tianxia* imperial system.

Finally, as we have said a few paragraphs back, Zhao Tingyang openly criticizes those world or regional organization born recently in the West, as the United Nations (UN) or the European Union (EU). According to his beliefs, Zhao denies the importance and the influence of any of these types of regional or world association. He argues that

Lecture, Harvard University, May 4th (2006).

until the primary actor, commonly recognized, will be the single unitary state, there will be no peace and harmony. There is no need for a hegemon, he declares, but only the need to accept the whole-ness of the world. According to Zhao, internationality in a globalized world is an expression of the past!

How many questions these concepts and perceptions raise? Zhao does not give exact explanation of how this world-ness, this global governance could be realized. Who in the specific could be part of the highest authority? Zhao's debate seems an exaltation of the anarchy of the good intentions, with no valid exemplification of feasible applications of his theory in this world. Nevertheless, there are some inputs that come from his writings that are worth to be noted.

Scholars around China have started discussing Zhao Tingyang's writings and ideas mainly criticizing the feasibility of their realization. Nonetheless, it is interesting that an overall tacit approval of the main principles of the Chinese Political Philosophy is common in several critics I have been able to come across. For instance, Zhou Lian defines Zhao Tingyang's theories fascinating and appealing, to the point that they will create and nurture wide discussions; however, he recognizes the presence of some contradictions in the relation between Zhao's theory and practice, and also poses doubts on how and according to what process the *Tianxia* system can become a norm.⁶⁰ To sum up, it seems that Chinese scholars are not rebuking the greatness of the concept of *Tianxia*, and everything that it embeds; however, they realize the difficulties and also the dangers that such concepts can cause in the researching of Chinese style of foreign policy.

⁶⁰ Zhou, Lian, "*Tianxia Tixi de liang tiao fangfalun yuanze – 天下体系的两条方法论原则*", *Zhongguo Shuping – 中国书评*, Deng Zhenglai Ed. (2006).

They worry about how could it negatively contribute to the popular idea of China as a threat for the West.

The argument proposed by Zhao Tingyang certainly is very fascinating, and surely enough has given boost to a series of discussion regarding the different approaches in the West and in China to the problem of international relations. The most evident characteristic of this discussion is the stress put in the apparently huge differentiation between Western ideas and Chinese alternative ideas. It seems like Zhao asserts that there would be no possible complementary relation between the beliefs of one side in opposition to those of the other side.

Actually, there is a scholar, Qin Yaqing⁶¹, who defines these differences between the so-called Westphalian system of international relations and the cultural-ethical-political Chinese system of world order, supported by the fundamental teachings of the Chinese philosophical schools. While, he accepts that one philosophy cannot acts as an exclusive method of understanding in respect to the other, and acknowledges that both have important contribution to offer. However, intrinsic in his discourse, is implied his considerable appreciation for the Chinese style of philosophy. He exalts the moral virtues of the Confucians, the importance of rites and the reciprocity of relational respect. As a final point, Chinese scholars have been intrigued by the challenging contents of the writing of Zhao Tingyang. Nevertheless, we are free to say that they are not showing loud appreciation of it, but instead, they are fomenting a pretty careful praised discussion. We

⁶¹ Qin, Yaqing, “Guoji Guanxi Lilun Zhongguo Xuepai Shengcheng de Keneng He Biran – 国际关系理论中国学派生成的可能和必然,” *Shijie Jingji Yu Zhengzhi* – 世界经济与政治, 3, (Beijing: 2006).

can surely affirm that the theme of *Tianxia* and its cultural-ethical-political alternative will not pass unobserved, as the same previously cited Zhou Lian⁶² is personally admitting in his critics of Zhao's book.

There are other interesting outcomes of the all newly revitalized discussion about the ancient cultural concept of Chinese imperial system, all-under-heaven and family structure. As we have quoted above, a luminary and internationally recognized scholar, Wang Gongwu, Director of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore, has recently presented a new study at the Harvard University, explaining the improved interest in the study of *Tianxia*. In his talk, Wang Gongwu discusses how several authors, in particular the so-called *huaqiao* 华侨 – Overseas Chinese, from the 19th and 20th century, have perceived the *Tianxia* and how they are considered today by Chinese in the mainland and around the world.

Wang Gongwu refers to a group of people born and lived between 1850 and 1950. In the specifics, they are part of that group of people of Chinese origins, who for the first time studied Chinese culture and language not as their first language, but had the opportunity of leaving the country to study abroad. The century we are referring to, is the century in which China came to face its backwardness, the empire was decaying and the emergence of a plausible ideal of nation-state-building had become subject of frequent discussions. China was in a turning point of his history and had to pick the road to follow, while entering the modern era. There is one character cited by Wang Gongwu that I

⁶² Zhou, Lian, “*Tianxia Tixi de liang tiao fangfalun yuanze* – 天下体系的两条方法论原则”, *Zhongguo Shuping* – 中国书评, Deng Zhenglai Ed. (2006).

believe is worth noting. His name was Ku Hung-ming (also written Gu Hongming), who lived between 1857 and 1928. The reason why I deem important Wang Gongwu's discussion about Ku is that Ku was known because of his strong contraposition of the violent Western civilization and the appraisal of the peaceful antagonistic forces of Chinese civilization. Ku had been educated in Germany, hence he used western language and categories to praise the Chinese *Tianxia*, the moral values and political justification linked to it, as opposed to the Western values' system mainly measured by material categories like individual's well being.⁶³ The most interesting part of Wang Gongwu's argument about Ku Hung-ming is his surprised description of how today his writings have been re-translated and publicized in Mainland China. It is, in fact, surprising that this renewed appreciation for his works is happening after a phase of extreme criticism toward him, which had started at the time of the movement of May Fourth 1919 and continued all the way through the establishment of the new Communist forces (1949) and later. It is indeed unforeseen and astonishing that a personage criticized because associated with the imperial power of the Qing Dynasty, also known for his high consideration of Manchu aristocrats, can today offer a strong analysis of the current society. Wang Gongwu explains this phenomenon exposing a very crucial observation:

[...] it does suggest a renewed curiosity about one of Ku Hung-ming's pet themes, the ideal of *tianxia* as universal empire, and a pre-national or multinational perspective that stressed civilizational competence and respectability if not cultural superiority.

⁶³ Wang, Gongwu, "Tianxia and Empire: External Chinese Perspectives," *Inaugural Tsai Lecture, Harvard University*, May 4th (2006).

[...] It is all the more interesting, therefore, that there has been renewed interest in Ku Hung-ming, the controversial reactionary that had once been mocked if not downright despised. Is he more memorable because he was eccentric and outspoken? Or is it because he asked the big questions about what China once stood for, not nation or empire but a moral tianxia that all should care for?⁶⁴

There is one final remark that I have extrapolated from Wang Gongwu lecture at Harvard University. That is, within those people Wang Gongwu described as representative of the national and public sentiment bursting out during the first years of the 20th century, there was one person who converted to Christianity. His name was Li Denghui, born in Java and educated in English schools in Singapore. Li Denghui was fond of his Chineseness, but also of his own choice toward his religious beliefs. He had accepted the dual possibility of being a Chinese deeply embedded in the Chinese culture, political and moral system, but also grown in the midst of Western customs and “adopting another set of tianxia ideals”.⁶⁵ As a result, a hint can be drawn from this assertion. Thus, the *Tianxia* system, and its moral values, is an answer to the need for mystical questions proper of all human beings. Through the story of Li Denghui it appears that the *Tianxia* spirituality can be considered an alternative to the Christian spirituality, but also that the two forms of mystic approach to the proper behaviors to follow in life can be one complementary to the other. However, Wang Gongwu does not

⁶⁴ Wang, Gongwu, “Tianxia and Empire: External Chinese Perspectives,” *Inaugural Tsai Lecture, Harvard University*, May 4th (2006).

⁶⁵ Ibid, 15.

report any revivals of the works of Li Denghui. This can be explained within the high control that the New Chinese “Communist” Empire maintains over the minds of his subjects. The CCP, using the propaganda organization and the religious control would rather censor a work that illustrate not univocal choices, while would promote the official translation of other works related to any themes can help boost the ideology of the “empire,” as those of Ku Hung-ming.

Future Research

To conclude, after having discussed the basic components of Chinese philosophy, I have illustrated how the main Chinese teachings on moral values have influenced the formation of the Chinese political system. I have traced back the key principles at the base of Chinese historical longevity, which re-conduce to two major philosophies, the Confucian and the Legalist. That is, on the one hand, the family structure as the central organization in the Chinese world; hence, the reverence for higher authority to maintain social order. Moreover, the respect for moral values, taught by the erudite of the society, through the observation of proper behaviors, pursuable by, again, respecting ceremonies and rites. On the other hand, we have the fear, imposed by the Legalist beliefs, of being punished by terrible laws and rules to apply in case of defections from the core structure of the social order. With the help of these two sections of teachings, in the midst of Confucianism and Legalism, is possible the Chinese empire durability and the idealistic Chinese order.

I have then underlined the differences between China and the West, in particular the distinctions between the Chinese and the Roman imperial approaches regarding human beings; in addition, the diverse methods of building power, managing power, but also talking about power. As we have seen, the history and the structure of the Roman Empire give us explanation of what trajectory has developed from ancient Rome to Middle-Age Europe, until modern history. That is, there is a common thread between the perception of the authority and the division of territories and the application of laws during the Roman Empire and in the West nowadays. The same happens for China and the history of her civilization. The biggest difference is the lack of the development of the concept of individuality and subjectivity, offered in the West by Christian religious beliefs, and almost abhorred in China as a measure that could disaggregate the collective order. Moreover, it is clear until today that the application of laws also has been always sort of imposed by the top and never considered a mean for everybody in the society. The law was and still is the secret, often murky hand of the supreme power.

Consequently, I have compared the traditional system of the Chinese empire to the new Chinese empire, and I showed how continuity and uniformity, which are the major and crucial preoccupations of every Chinese dynasty in power, have managed to be fully realized. That is, until today we are still asserting that Chinese political system is the most enduring, never-changing, firm, political organization in the entire world, as it is mirrored by the same fixity the family structure has maintained till these days.

Finally, I have illustrated a new wave of thinking, based on the Tianxia system, that is not yet completely accepted or officially recognized as a proper Chinese belief yet, but that is being steamed up, voluntarily or not, within China. This is probably because of

the fascinating historical and philosophical background it is founded on. Now, it is extremely important for us, outside China, to keep interrogating ourselves on the veracity of these new ideas, and also on the possibility of becoming the bastion of the new Chinese attitude toward the outside world. For this reason, it is poignant that we try to individuate the essential questions that *Tianxia* poses, in order to be able to research on all the possible answers we need to be able to suggest to face the Chinese mastodonic novelty.

Key Puzzles for Future Studies

Many questions are provoked by this discussion, which will deserve further investigation in future research. Surely enough, the global framework and the ever changing equilibrium of international relations will not allow some of these questions to remain unanswered. For this reason, we should not be afraid to try to understand the feasibility of the Chinese willingness to create an international system able to substitute the Westphalian system, idea that seems to be suggested by the discussions about the concept of *Tianxia*. The issue of substitution of the Westphalian system represents the paramount question that worries us. It is also the crucial uncertainty, which sort of sets the time for necessary supplementary investigations. We need to keep in our minds that there are two different groups of questions that it is essential that we address, and I here divide them in positive and normative questions. Answers to positive questions will allow us to improve our knowledge about the context where this discussion develops in. Certainly there cannot be ignorance of details, whether they are coming from little or big parts, or either from significant or less significant sections of the entire universe. In

addition, this debate over *Tianxia* has raised some normative questions on how nation-states should act and react in the contemporary worldwide scenario.

As far as positive questions, we should reflect upon the reasons why there are some old authors of modern China, as Ku Hung-ming, vehemently criticized in the past, but now reaffirmed and appreciated in China. In addition, in case we want to make predictions, forecast potential events, and elaborate strategies to face the 21st century “peacefully” rising China, there is an entire world of affirmations and contradictions in current China that needs to be dealt with. That is, we should consider how could postulations about equality, people’s will and people’s dictatorship, peaceful rise and harmonious society be true and sincere. Is it possible to deem truthful the ostensibly solid creed of socialism with Chinese characteristics, when at the same time, the Chinese accept countless compromises with Western institution? On the other hand, while they adopted Western market economy, while they are currently an active element of the international western-categorized order, while they are modeling their legal system on a form coming from the West and the Roman tradition, they are at the same time firmly proclaiming that what they believe in and what they establish their doctrine on, is everything but coming from the West? We should ask ourselves if we are experiencing the same old Chinese story of the Chinese emperor with a silken robe on one hand and a sword in the other? And we want to react to that?

As far as normative questions, I deem reasonable to ask ourselves if, as required by the realization of the *Tianxia* system, while in need of a supra-power to govern the world, would that power above all be personified by China? Since China is the best connoisseur of the *Tianxia* ideal, could not she be offering herself as an answer? What we

know for sure is that there is nothing that remains unplanned under the control of the supreme party (CCP) power. Differently, are the theories of “peaceful rise” and “harmonious society” only deterrence strategies to deceive and scare off the “others”, or are just transitory solutions, while trying to preserve the status quo for as long as it is needed? And how long would that long be? Would it be until they are powerful enough to attack the current hegemon of the international scenario? Or, are Chinese really convinced about the good intentions behind the target of the harmonious society? And do we deem them convincing?

It is indisputably appropriate to be ready to answer these types of questions, because the West needs a more conscientious knowledge about modern and contemporary China, in addition to the knowledge of the past of China. Could we just speculate on China, or could we actually try to explore the country *in situ* and try to natch the real essence of China and unmask it? In the end, when relating to China, a big frustration can materialize, which would make us ask: “Is not every attempt on this subject just worthless? The power of the higher authority and the resistant rhetoric will not always be stronger? At any rate, I am willing to take the risk of incoming in this type of worthlessness!

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